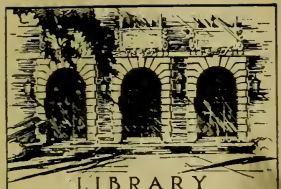
HOLLAND HOUSE.



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CHANTILLY.

" Dans sa pompe élégante, admirez Chantilli,
De heros en héros, d'age en age embelli."
DELILLE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
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THE PAGE.

CHAPTER V.

SCARCELY had the Moor passed up the stair, when a figure advanced cautiously into the dark and narrow passage, and after looking suspiciously around, placed the taper which he carried behind one of the large stones with which the place was strewn, and laying his hand on the hilt of his sword, appeared to listen intently. He wore neither helmet nor scarf; but without these, the dark and gloomy

brow, and above all, the ferocious glance which he directed into every corner of the recess, at once proclaimed him the Baron's cousin—Robert the Red. Excepting the heavy iron boots, he had divested himself of the whole of his armour, and was attired in the close jerkin of buff-leather always worn underneath, to prevent its pressure from injuring the wearer. He remained in a listening attitude for a short time, and then, as if apparently satisfied that none lurked near to watch his proceedings, he deliberately withdrew his hand from his sword, and called in an under tone,

"Hybelin, if thou thinkest any are watching in the castle, it were wiser to stand in this dark recess, where none may perceive us, and where we may converse more freely."

At these words his companion advanced, no longer attired in the garb of the freebooters;

but habited as the retainers of La Morlaye, in azure and white.

Robert stood leaning against the wall with his arms folded, and his eyes directed towards the ground, while a gloomy frown was gathered on his brow, which was even paler than usual. He thus remained buried in thought, and by the dark workings of his countenance, it would appear that his reflections were of no very pleasant nature. At length, after heaving a long-drawn sigh, he raised his eyes, and said in a deep and hollow voice:

"Hybelin, my fate is fixed; I must leave the castle ere daylight, never more to return in friendship with its owner; yonder accursed Moor, by whom thou wert so fairly baffled, has discovered my secret, and already filled my Lady's mind with dark suspicions concerning me. There is nothing left but to fly, ere she imparts them to my cousin; she is a

woman, Hybelin, and will not yield till she has convinced him."

"What!" exclaimed Hybelin, "are all our long-cherished hopes to be overthrown by yon dark-visaged infidel? By Heaven! it shall not be. Give but the word, and long before sunrise the castle shall be in our hands; the best and bravest of our band are outlying in the wood, ready to answer our signal, and it will be no small wonder if they do not enter the gates, when we ourselves stand within to draw the bolts."

"Ay, and lead them straightway into the very jaws of the dreaded forest Wolf! By all the fiends, it is wisely spoken!" returned Robert ironically: "No, no, Hybelin; fate has declared against us; we are defeated at every turn, had it not been thus, long enough ere this the signal should have been given, and Robert the Red have been hailed Lord of La Morlaye."

"And why can it not be now? Is it that you think we lack courage for the enterprise? Or do you already repent the treaty? Beware how you trifle with the brave foresters, Sir Knight; they can ill brook any thing like treachery: by all that 's valiant! we soon should see that they stand not in need of their patron's aid to render them free of the cellars and kitchens of La Morlaye. They already murmur at our delay, and wonder at its cause: be not thus irresolute; the gate is merely watched by the two drowsy warders; it would be strange if we did not take them by surprise, and I warrant the castle will not be long in changing owners."

"Hybelin," replied Robert, "thy plan is apparently a good one; and yesternight, when we met as usual, it was thus we had laid our scheme. But it is over, our enterprise is at an end, and now, instead of opening the gates to admit our comrades, we must even use all despatch in escaping ourselves, or we may per-

chance meet the very fate which we had so kindly destined for others."

"By Heaven, Sir Knight, you have betrayed us!" cried Hybelin, in a transport of rage; "what means this sudden change of purpose? Guilbert's suspicion, then, was well-founded; you have beguiled us to the outskirts of the wood, that we might fall an easy prey to the Wolf of La Morlaye. But you shall not escape us; more than one of the band have already taxed you with treason. Mark me, Sir Robert! all are prepared for instant revenge, and we resemble not the Baron Clodomir, who thus permits so foul a traitor to lurk near, for lack of courage to punish him."

The eyes of Robert the Red flashed with indignation at this speech, while his cheek and lip turned of the hue of death.

"Liar! villain! slave!" said he in a voice almost choked by passion; "quickly shalt

thou rue this insolence." And springing forward, ere the robber could turn aside, he seized him by the throat, and held him in a powerful grasp against the wall, seemingly unconscious of his gigantic efforts to escape. The blood rushed to Hybelin's face, which suddenly became of a frightful blackness; and Robert, loosening his hold with one hand, passed it hurriedly over his belt, as if searching for his dagger, but in vain, for none was there. "Confusion!" he muttered, as recollection returned. "Fool that I am, there lies the grievance;" and shaking the robber off with a violence which sent him reeling to the end of the passage, he struck his forehead with his clenched fist, while his countenance bore the fearful impress of rage and despair.

For a while he paced up and down with hasty strides, until the passion by which he was agitated had subsided; and when he turn-

ed to his companion, who stood exhausted and breathless from the shock he had undergone, every trace of it had passed away, and he advanced to where the robber yet remained leaning against the door, and stretching forth his hand, said in a soothing tone,

"Forgive my haste, Hybelin; already do I repent it; but verily my wrath was somewhat moved, to find that those who have least cause to doubt my faith, should be the first to tax me with falsehood."

Hybelin took the proffered hand in sullen silence, and Robert continued:

"In good sooth it is the act of brainless idiots, thus to waste in wrangling and disputing the time that should be employed in providing a safe retreat. On my soul, it is true, Hybelin, I must fly hence before sunrise or I may never after behold its light."

"In the fiend's name, what evil has

chanced ?" exclaimed Hybelin, now really alarmed, and forgetting for the moment, in the idea of approaching danger, the recent indignity he had suffered.

" Listen and thou shalt hear," returned Robert: " all our plans, which but yesternight seemed in such fair way of success, are, I fear me, for ever overthrown by the accursed penetration of yonder dog of a Saracen; but, by the evil one himself, I swear I will have revenge!—succeed or fail, the Moor must die!"

" It is well spoken," returned Hybelin gloomily; " and verily, to speak truth, I will not refuse my services to hasten his death; for the lad is over quick in mind and somewhat too nimble in motion for our purpose. Nothing will succeed while he loitereth about the castle, to watch with eagle eye all that is passing. You say wisely, Sir Knight, the Moor must die!"

" Thank thee, thank thee for that speech,

Hybelin," exclaimed the Red Knight joyfully: "I hate the Moor, and thou, if thou didst well, wouldst hate him too. Our lives are in his hands, and had it not been for the Baron's fond credulity, he might long ago have stamped my ruin. Dost remember, my esquire, when I dismissed thee from my tent with injunctions to hasten back to the forest and join again the robber-band to keep them from doing mischief? Dost remember how I bade thee not attack the Castle till my return, nor yet molest the Lady of La Morlaye, as I myself had secret love for her? Dost remember all this? It was still midnight, was it not? — and the lamp which hung over the couch, where I lay wounded and feverish, cast but a dim and glimmering light around. Well, what thinkest thou? — thou wert no sooner departed, and the door of the tent closed after thee, when a soft, stealthy, cat-like step approached. I gazed in alarm,

for I knew not whence it came—and lo you! it was, forsooth, my Lord the Baron's dark-eyed Moorish prisoner, sent by his master to inquire if I had found relief from pain in slumber; for—Ha-ha! only think how I am loved!—of all the retinue, there was not another who would do the errand cheerfully, not one save the infidel dog who would willingly rise at midnight to inquire concerning me; and, so—and so—dost see? he heard the whole of our discourse, and a right goodly one it was; he heard my farewell blessing; he heard my curses on the child, and vows for his destruction; and this it was, kind-hearted fool, which made him rather choose to serve my Lady than my Lord, and for this has he watched so tenderly over the boy to keep him from harm."

"And why did you not at the moment silence him for ever?"

"Ah! name it not, Hybelin: had I not

been chained to the couch of sickness, I could willingly have stabbed him where he stood. I called upon thee in my rage, but thou wert already far away, and thus the Moor departed in possession of a secret which none beside myself and thee could otherwise have known. Since then he has been too near the Baron to afford me opportunity of securing my own safety by his death. I even begged of Clodomir that he might be dispatched, but the canting, pious milksop would not listen to my proposal; nay, I verily believe he thought it was mere coveting the jewels of his Saracen garb which made me urge it, and by way of recompense he has promised me the ransom which he has hopes will be sent to redeem him from captivity. By the mass! if it be not sent right quickly, it will arrive somewhat over late, methinks! Swear that you will aid me to take his life, and I shall be content!"

With these words he drew his sword, and

presented the huge cross-handle to Hybelin's lips, who bent forward as if to kiss it in token of faith, but instantly drew back, to Robert's great amazement, and uttering a faint cry of terror, pointed to the extended weapon. Robert gazed also in dismay, for a bright stream of light quivered on the cross where Hybelin should have kissed it, as if to intercept the horrid oath. For an instant it trembled there, and then danced down the keen Damascus blade towards himself: it shone brightly on his belt, then on the burnished gold clasps used to secure his dagger, and then gliding steadily along the wall towards the open air, disappeared, leaving nothing to disturb the gloom save the faint and flickering light of the taper shining from behind the stone where it had been placed for concealment.

"We are watched; there are eaves-droppers abroad!" said the Red Knight calmly, and brandishing the sword which he had already

drawn from the scabbard, boldly rushed to the doorway. Hybelin, who dreaded being left alone in the dark recess after this event, accompanied him, and they both looked anxiously around, but in vain—all was still and silent as before: the moon shone fair as ever in the clear blue sky, and nothing was to be seen which could lead to an elucidation of the mystery. "It is strange!" said Robert at length, as his keen eye seemed to search every corner of the courtyard, "it is passing strange! there must have been a listener on the watch. If so, a flaw in his breastplate were an evil chance: I warrant me it would be somewhat wider ere we parted."

"And yet the light," said Hybelin, "has disappeared in so mysterious a manner, that—"

"Plague on thy old woman's fancies!" said Robert, interrupting him, well knowing his superstition, and willing to dissipate his fears.

" It was some drunken retainer of the Baron's, seeking his chamber after the midnight wassail. It were wiser to forget it altogether. See! already has the moon waxed paler, and the stars more dim; we must hasten our proceedings, or morning will dawn, and all will then be lost. Soon as the gates are open, thou, as usual, taking care to conceal thy face in thy cloak, wilt escape to the wood, and disperse the band who are watching for us; thou must quiet their impatience, and I will quickly follow."

" And what shall prevent them from taking instant revenge for their disappointment, Sir Knight?"

Robert coolly pointed downward to his gilt spurs, without deigning a reply.

" You deceive yourself, Sir Knight," continued Hybelin, quickly comprehending the gesture; " the awe which rank and fame had at

first inspired among the freebooters is fast subsiding, and they would now more reverence a chief who would lead them to victory and plunder, than even Robert the Red, the most valiant knight in Christendom."

"Then would I shout in their ears, 'Remember Paderborn!' Thinkest thou they would still rebel? No, I know them well: they would crouch and tremble, as when the hated cry of 'La Morlaye is at hand!' rang through the woods on the day of our debate; when each countenance wore the hue of La Morlaye's own milk-white plume, and all fled in confusion, none daring to face him."

Hybelin, who had just felt the effects of Robert's anger, did not choose to irritate him further by reminding him that he himself was the first to take flight on the alarm being given, but merely remarked, that a bold bearing and haughty words might avail much,

but that no argument was like a well-tempered dagger.

"Think not of that, Hybelin!—think not of that!" said Robert, starting: "know, it is my dagger alone which causeth all this grief, and the total failure of our plans."

"How so?" said the robber, with a peculiar smile, and fixing his eyes on the sheath stuck in Robert's belt, which the bright moonlight showed to be empty. "What has the dagger to do with our enterprise?"

"Listen, and I will tell thee—but quickly, for time is wearing away: Thou knowest my voice in the council was always raised against the scheme of attacking the castle by night; for well do I know that no earthly power could compel Clodomir to yield the heritage of his forefathers even to the boldest and most dreaded of his enemies; what but defeat can then await those who tremble at his very name?

The assault were far better made by day, when the Baron and his followers are at the chase, and few are left within to defend it. Once being masters of the Castle, we could quickly take its Lord; for thou hast oftentimes seen with what proud security it is his wont to gallop into his own castle-yard! Had you followed my advice, and acted thus yester-morn, all would have been well; but now this will never chance, for Clodomir is too valiant to yield to force, and too prudent to be surprised by stratagem."

"Of his valour none can doubt; but, methinks, his prudence were not rightly deemed marvellous," observed Hybelin with a sneer.

"I tell thee, Hybelin," returned Robert fiercely, his choler rising as he perceived the allusion, "Clodomir, and the robbers know it well too, possesseth in warfare all the fiery courage of youth, joined to the wise caution of

experience: it is this which has won the heart of the Emperor, causing him to shower down favours on his head, while Robert the Red, the champion of his army, who risked his own life-blood to shield him from dishonour, remains unheeded and neglected! What reward have I received for this service, save yonder paltry, accursed dagger? and, confusion seize it, it is even that which has now led me to perdition! Yes, Hybelin, it is true: to escape destruction I must depart from La Morlaye, and it were madness to harbour in the forest, when my flight is discovered. Clodomir is like the hooded falcon: although watchful and quicksighted, she suffereth her prey to hover near, and heedeth it not. In like manner is he blinded by his love for me; but, soon as the veil has dropped from his sight, then, like that keen-eyed bird when loosed from her silken jesses, will he without pause dart upon his enemies, and, trust

me, ere long their very names will be forgotten by all!"

"It cannot be that our chance of success is gone for ever; if the Baron himself be not suspicious, all may yet go well," said Hybelin.

"Thou shalt quickly judge if any of you have a chance of any other than a felon's death," answered Robert, irritated at the pertinacity of his companion; "already has the Baron himself, through the machinations of the Moor, begun to exhibit symptoms of mistrust, which, when once roused, are not so easy to allay. This morn, as we rode out at the castle gate, he was in his usual merry mood, already numbering with delight the vanquished enemies with which, as he anticipated, the dungeons of La Morlaye would be filled before evening. Nay, more; a gibbet was to have been quickly dressed for the two most worthy of the band, who, if they had not met with somewhat better luck, would be now hanging on yonder hill. Know

ye whom he thus meant to favour?—ha! in truth the name of the one is Robert the Red, his own cousin; that of the other Hybelin, his esquire. Nay, start not; 'twas even as I tell thee: thou for thy bold attempt to carry off the boy, and myself for having the air and presence of Robert the Red; in short, for being too much like myself. He strongly suspects the well-accoutred Knight whom he chased through the forest to be the chief of the robbers; so thou seest he is something of a soothsayer, as well as a warrior, for never did astrologer divine more rightly. It was thus that, well pleased with the prospect of success, La Morlaye pursued his search after his hidden foes. But as night drew near, and still nothing was heard in answer to the sounds of defiance which ever and anon burst from his bugle, his tone of joyous exultation was changed to disappointment, and contempt at their cowardice.

"It was on the brow of the hill, as we rode

side by side, that Clodomir, who had remained sullen and dejected ever since he had reluctantly given the word to turn our steeds towards the castle, abruptly broke silence, by exclaiming with bitterness, "I doubt me not my Lady will greatly marvel at our tardiness; but the wonder will be somewhat increased when it is discovered that our delay is not occasioned by the too great burthen of our trophies." As he spoke, we had reached the spot where thou didst seize the boy yesternight; the prints of the palfrey's footsteps were yet visible in the long grass, and one place more trampled than the rest showed where the Lady Blanche had struggled with thee for the possession of her child! This sight apparently brought to mind the unavenged indignity, and threats of direst vengeance against the robbers, mingled with curses at his own untoward fate in having missed

them, escaped his lips. Now I well knew, that the very mention of the forest-band is at all times sufficient to rouse him into fury, but had never before witnessed a transport of anger like his at that moment; and, seeking to appease his wrath, I made a slight commendation of the Moor, who had so boldly rescued the young Clarion. Whether it was the tone of sarcasm in which the words were uttered, for thou canst not think I meant to serve the lad, or, in short, owing to a guilty conscience, but methought the Baron eyed me with suspicion, and starting, as if some sudden thought had struck him, he said hastily,

"By naming the Moor, thou hast recalled to mind what I had wellnigh forgotten; thou must feel how much I stand indebted to the lad for the service he has rendered me, and to do him justice, he has shown no lack of courage, which alone can excuse the boldness of

the request which he has made to my Lady, and which, by overweening perseverance, she has extorted from me a promise to consent that she should grant. It concerneth thyself, Robin, and as yet remaineth a secret to all, save the Moor himself, who careth not to divulge it, seeing that it would mar some project of his, which is to be of marvellous service in discovering the robbers." I own this somewhat startled me, but I was little prepared for what followed. "It would seem," he continued, "that the boy is in possession of a token, whereof he affecteth great mystery. It appertaineth, no doubt, to the traitor Hybelin; but for some reason or other he will not produce it, except thou agree to be present. Thou wilt greatly favour me by complying with this demand, for to speak truth, the suspicions of the silly vassals are raised against thee, because, forsooth! it chanceth to be thy treacherous esquire who sought to rob me of my precious child."

"Did you comply?" said Hybelin eagerly.

"I did," returned Robert, "and thus pronounced my own sentence! The Moor holdeth, as it were, my death-warrant; a proof that cannot fail to shake even Clodomir's all-trusting credulity: it is the dagger, of which I spake to thee but now, Charlemagne's gift. An arrow from La Morlaye's cross-bow striking the hand wherein I held it ready for defence, caused it to drop, when I fled before him from our debate yester-morn. The Moor must have found it on my track, and the Baron knows each step of the path I followed in my retreat, for he has pointed it out to me with most accursed precision. I knew all this; yet to quiet his suspicions for the moment, I yielded with seeming joyfulness to his request, that to-morrow should produce the token! I laughed then to hear him talk of to-morrow, when I thought that ere to-morrow he would be in a

dungeon, and myself master of La Morlaye! But mark you how fortune has cheated us; judge of my consternation, when, on arriving at the castle, countless liveries of the hated azure everywhere met my view! Yes, Hybelin, the Sieur de Loménie is now within these walls, with bold retainers enough to defeat the robbers, even without aid from the Baron!"

Hybelin drew back with a look of dismay: here was indeed a check to their enterprise which he had but little anticipated, and one that put an end to all their hopes of success for the present; moreover, he knew that with such powerful aid, as soon as Robert's guilt should become manifest, revenge, swift and dire, would fall on the freebooters, and the Red Knight's foreboding would soon be amply verified; while, if it remained undiscovered till the departure of Loménie, they might renew their plans with redoubled vigour.

"And how did the Baron receive your consent?" at length he said, after musing for some time.

"With all the frank confidence of his noble nature; upbraiding himself for having suffered a doubt to enter his mind, and swearing never again to be persuaded into suspicion. Clodomir loves me, Hybelin; he remembereth with gratitude all my care of his younger years; but he knoweth not,—alas! how should he know?—how disappointment and unrewarded faith have dried up all source of affection in the heart that once, like his own, beat high with hope and honourable ambition."

The robber's countenance had gradually brightened while Robert was speaking, and he joyfully exclaimed, "Then is there another means of deceiving the Baron; tell me, has the Lord of La Morlaye an excess of love for the Moor?"

" Methinks, not of late," returned Robert; " he has perceived the lad's suspicious dislike of myself, and that is at all times sufficient to ensure the aversion of my simple-hearted cousin."

" It is well," said Hybelin; " let him but rather put confidence in Robert the Red than in this infidel, and he will yet be ours ere long. Look you, Sir Knight, did I not seek the welfare of our band, more than my own glory, I were a fool to disclose the mishap which has befallen me; but what can be gained by concealment when our safety is at stake? To be brief, then, the Moor has not found the dagger, but fairly wrenched it from me in our encounter in the forest."

Robert looked aghast.

" Reproach me not," continued Hybelin, perceiving the change in his countenance, " or I may perchance think of your own want of

faith in thus being secretly armed, when you had taken oath ever to appear at our counsels without sword or dagger, and refuse to assist you now when none else can be of service. Besides, it was the mere chance of combat; he was mounted, I on foot, and embarrassed by the struggling child."

"And so," said Robert, with a sardonic laugh, "thou didst let him ride off with both child and dagger! Of a truth thou hast acquitted thyself of thy task most nobly; it is thou, then, who hast ruined our cause; it is thou then who —"

"Not so — not so, Sir Knight," returned Hybelin; "had it chanced otherwise, there could have been no help, for the keen eyes of the Moor could not choose but spy the dagger when it lay in his path. But out of evil has sprung good; we now can, not only serve ourselves, but hasten the destruction of the ac-

cuser. Now, I would wager a gold mark, that before to-morrow night the young Saracen will have met his fate! ay—ay, and by the Baron's own orders too, or else he loves you not."

"By what token?" said Robert eagerly; "I conjure thee name it quickly?"

"By reason of the precious jewel in the hilt: it was a rich and costly dagger; and so—and so——Hush! did you hear nothing moving? Methought I heard footsteps."

"Proceed, proceed!" returned the Red Knight impatiently, "it was the sound of thy own voice alone."

Hybelin resumed: "It was a rich and costly dagger, and so, the robbers, that is I, thought it were best—"

"Hark!" interrupted Robert, "thou sayest right, I hear a slight noise in the castle. By Heaven, it must be the morning watch! see how

the night has waned away!" And turning to the east, he pointed to the faint streak of golden light just visible in the horizon. "Hie thee quickly behind the buttress; depart from the castle on the first opening of the gates at dawn; I will join thee at the cross in the wood, and there, beneath the blood-red scarf, now become our banner, thou shalt disclose to me the means whereby thou hast hope of escaping detection."

Hybelin withdrew to his hiding-place, and Robert stepped into the dark-arched passage, where he had before stood, till the footsteps had died away. "It is well!" muttered he to himself, as he stooped to raise the taper which he had placed behind the stone; "ye shall be mine at last, followers of La Morlaye! Ere long I shall be your master. By many this would be the sole happiness sought; but to me there is yet a greater. Shall I not have revenge? Ay, deep, dire, instant revenge on all who have

sought to awaken suspicions in Clodomir's bosom—on old Marcel, and young Raoùl, and on the Moor, quick and signal vengeance!" He started—for a cold clammy hand was laid upon his extended arm; he turned, and beheld the pale, panic-stricken countenance of Hybelin, whose short and audible breathings plainly denoted the excess of fear under which he laboured.

"Fool!" exclaimed Robert, "what brought thee here?—and why hast thou left thy station?"

"The Moor! the Moor!" cried Hybelin, trembling with agitation.

"Well, what hast thou heard so marvellous concerning him? Hast thou seen him? By the fiend! doth he again lurk near to listen to our discourse?"

"I fear me he has indeed been abroad to-night, and truly I know not whither, for,

while musing on the speedy death we had ourselves awarded him, I chanced to raise my eyes to the chamber where he reposeth, and there I saw a light shining bright and steady from the casement. I can swear that it was not there when we first entered this gloomy passage; and remember you not, Sir Robert, the dancing ray of light which alarmed us not long ago?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Robert, "if this be true, he has indeed been close at hand, for I myself could not but fancy I heard the shutting of yonder door, when we first came hither to converse."

As he said this, he again rushed into the court-yard, and looked upward to the lattice, but no light was there, and the sounds which had before disturbed them had wholly ceased. Inwardly cursing Hybelin for a simple credulous fool, he stealthily took his way to his own

chamber, leaving his companion to the solitary enjoyment of his own fears. Had he arrived a moment sooner, he would have seen the Moor himself advance, and with his small slender fingers extinguish the lamp which had served to guide him to the chamber of the Jew, and which had caused so much alarm in the weak and guilty mind of Hybelin.

CHAPTER VI.

It was about the hour of noon on the following day when the Lady Blanche, attended by Clotilde alone, left the solitude of her bower to wander with hurried and uncertain steps upon the high ramparts of the castle. Here she paced anxiously to and fro for some time in silence, now listening with attentive ear in the direction of the forest, now bending forward with outstretched neck over the low breastwork of the wall to gaze on the broad valley beneath.

At length, apparently weary with watching,

she seated herself on one of the stone benches, placed there for the service of the warders, and hiding her face in her hands, as if overcome by grief, sobbed aloud. "Oh that I had followed the wise counsel of Father Gregoire!" said she, as she raised her tearful eyes to her faithful attendant, whose pale and melancholy countenance plainly denoted that she also took ample share in the feelings which agitated her beloved mistress,—"Oh that I had never departed from his advice!" continued the lady, "to do evil that good might straightway follow. Sorely do I now repent having concealed from Clodomir the arrival of the young Moor's ransom. Think, Clotilde! should any thing now betide the lad, the Baron of La Morlaye would be branded for ever as false and treacherous throughout the land! For what could bring a darker stain upon his name than the murder, for such it would be called, of his ransomed prisoner?—

But it may not yet be too late: soon as the milk-white plume of the Baron appears in sight will I hasten forward and confess the whole truth."

"Pray Heaven he may listen to your speech, sweet lady," said Clotilde.

"He must, he shall listen. Ah, it is surely the Red Knight who has hardened his heart, and caused him to act thus harshly towards the preserver of his child. Alas for the Moor! in seeking to rescue me and mine from ruin, he has himself found a dungeon; and Heaven only knows what may be his fate if I should be too late in my appeal. Look you, Clotilde, for all the broad lands in Christendom would I not that any evil chance should befall the Moor; it would cause a foul blot in the annals of the La Morlayes, which neither time nor future glory could wipe away. Of a truth I wax impatient as the thought of this comes over

me," she continued, suddenly starting up and looking anxiously around: "why do they thus tarry? Seest thou nothing to announce their return? — neither the snowy plume of the Baron,—nor my father's azure pennon,—nor the blood-red scarf of Robert?"

"They who would see the blood-red scarf must have even better eyes than those of the Moor," returned Clotilde; "ever since we beheld him ride out alone at the castle gate, the scarf has been wanting in his attire."

"Well, well, I doubt thee not," rejoined the Lady impatiently; "but no more suspicion, I beseech thee; other thoughts must now fill our minds: we must see that the Moor fall not a victim to his noble-hearted devotion. Hie thee to the warder; bid him mount to the watch-tower, that I may have the first signal of my Lord's approach: fly! lose not a moment! remember the life of the generous page

now depends upon our prompt exertions in his behalf."

Clotilde flew to execute her mistress's commands, while the Lady Blanche again bewailed with bitter repentance the fate to which she feared to have consigned her favourite.

And here for the present must she be left to her sorrow, in order that the reader may be made acquainted with those events of the morning, which had caused such a sudden change in the aspect of affairs, as the imprisonment, and apparent danger of El Adhel.

The ready confidence with which Robert the Red had yielded to the demand of the Baron, had at once, as we have seen, again dispelled the dark shadows which the latter had suffered to gather on his mind, and he turned his attention to the Moor, who now stood on the brink of ruin. For having dared to arraign a Knight and accuse him of treason, who should presume

to stand between him and the Christian's wrath? For what was the Moor?—an unclaimed, unransomed prisoner, in those rude times, when all prisoners were considered as slaves, to be bought, sold, or exchanged, according to the will of their captors. Accordingly La Morlaye resolved to feign entire forgetfulness of what had passed on the previous day, and gave orders for a fresh expedition to the forest, hoping that it would thus escape Robert's recollection: but in vain. With an eager triumph, which surprised, and secretly delighted Clodomir, did the Red Knight now demand to be confronted with his accuser.

The Baron, as a last resource, now endeavoured, by every gentle argument, to induce the Moor to confess that he had been misled, and to withdraw his charge, when Robert would, no doubt, be satisfied with a public acknowledgment of the same made before the

assembled vassals. But here again he found all his efforts fruitless, and when he bade him remember the immeasurable distance which lay between him and the object of his accusation, his reply was short, and strongly characteristic of his nation.

"The tiger of the forest," said he, "is savage and cunning when he thirsteth for blood; he croucheth in the thicket till his prey is near, and then he looketh not downward to the earth, but darteth forward, in haste to seize the timid fawn, which is bounding lightly by: when, lo! he treadeth on an asp!—the sting causeth him to stop:—he falls, roaring with the pain, and the fawn fleeth beyond his reach!"

The Baron, finding all his specious reasoning of no avail, began, as is usual in such cases, to grow angry and impatient. "It is well," said he; "if thou art determined to

rush upon destruction, it were useless seeking to prevent thee; but forget not that I have forewarned thee of the danger."

Notwithstanding this, Clodomir was too gentle and tender-hearted to suffer the Moor to fall a victim to his mistaken zeal for the safety of his child, and he secretly resolved to wait patiently till the first brunt of Robert's indignation had passed away, and then to ask full pardon for the offender.

The anxious moment at length arrived. The hall was crowded with the vassals assembled there by Clodomir's desire, that all might be convinced of his cousin's innocence, and witness his entire acquittal.

Robert entered with a firm step and an air of triumph, nor did he shrink from the scrutinizing gaze of those around. This was observed with regret, for there were few among the faithful followers of the Baron who did not,

in spite of their master's evident security, secretly hope that Robert's guilt might be made manifest. As the Red Knight entered, La Morlaye rose from his seat, and said in a loud voice—

"He who has charged Robert the Red, Knight of the Bleeding Heart, and kinsman of the La Morlayes, with treason, and has pledged himself to prove the same, let him now stand forth!"

At these words the page advanced up the narrow space left by the crowd of vassals which lined both sides of the hall. All eyes were riveted in mute attention upon his countenance, and many breathed a blessing as he passed; but the Moor looked neither to the right nor to the left: he fixed a steady mournful gaze upon the Baron, and walked firmly up to the judgement-seat. The slight and boyish person of the youth afforded a striking contrast to the

tall powerful frame of the Red Knight, by whose side he was placed. According to the custom of his country, when engaged upon affairs of importance, his dress was even more splendid than in common, while, on the contrary, that of Robert, as if in contempt of the ceremony, was unusually negligent and unpretending; and yet that upon such occasion he should have lacked the blood-red scarf, was matter of astonishment to all. It was evident, too, that he began to lose much of his self-possession from the moment the Moor appeared; and when the Baron, with an incredulous smile, called upon the latter to produce the proof which was to condemn his cousin, Robert changed colour, and was fain to lean against one of the pillars of the hall for support. A suspicion of Hybelin's treachery had just crossed his mind, and his heart sickened at the thought that in his eagerness to ruin the Moor he should have

been thus entrapped in his own snare; nor did the reflection that he had fully deserved this treatment at his esquire's hand tend to diminish his apprehension. There was a death-like pause as the Baron pronounced his summons, and a confused murmur was heard as the retainers pressed forward eager to catch the first word which should escape the lips of the Moor. He spoke at length: there was not the slightest embarrassment in his manner, neither could the most acute ear have discovered the least agitation in his voice. His words were uttered in that soft mellow tone so peculiar to himself, and which never failed to interest the hearer in his behalf.

"Oh, Lord of La Morlaye!" said he, "Allah knoweth well that it is neither in hope of gain, nor yet to gratify revenge, that I now stand here, but solely that my Lord the Baron may hold in peace the castle of his forefathers, and that still,

fair and undespoiled, it may one day descend to the child in whom the life of my honoured Lady is so bound up. Now," raising his voice, and turning to Robert, " here do I accuse the Red Knight of the Bleeding Heart of foul treachery in aiding the robbers of the forest to deprive my Lord of his inheritance; nay, more, he has furnished his caitiff 'squire with his own dagger to assassinate the innocent heir of La Morlaye. I know that he had it when he left the castle, for I watched his departure on the day of my Lord's expedition to the forest: it was from the hand of the traitor Hybelin that I wrenched it in the path—mark you, my Lord!—in the same path through which the false Knight fled who wore the scarlet plume. Behold! and say if El Adhel has used deceit!"

The colour forsook La Morlaye's cheek, and his brow darkened, as the page, unslinging the quiver which hung at his back, drew forth the

well-known dagger, and a universal exclamation of surprise and indignation burst from the assembly as it was held aloft to display the bleeding heart emblazoned on the hilt. The Moor then, dropping on one knee, laid it at the Baron's feet. Raoul, who stood in attendance, bent forward to raise it and present it to his master; but ere he could accomplish his object, the Red Knight, who had stood invoking curses on the head of his accuser, and trembling with guilty fear lest Hybelin should have betrayed him, suddenly sprang forward, and with frantic eagerness clenched it in his grasp. He glanced his eye rapidly over the weapon: the effect of his scrutiny was almost magical, for when he again raised his head, the expression of hatred and rage which had overspread his countenance, had entirely vanished, and changed to one of ineffable scorn and malignant triumph. He had seen the altered look of Clodomir when

the dagger was produced; but this now gave him no uneasiness: he himself boldly presented it with that sneer which had ever been the terror of La Morlaye, and from which he shrank far more than from the javelins of the Infidels.

"Albeit I may be considered somewhat over bold," said he ironically, "methinks if I were allowed but to question my potent accuser, I could prove all that he has stated to be false, save alone my claim to this weapon; the which I will not deny, but rather confess myself overjoyed at again beholding it, seeing that it is a true and loyal steel, and has ever been a steady friend to its master, dealing deep and active vengeance on all against whom he has cause of hate."

"The request is just: speak on, Sir Knight," said Clodomir coldly, shuddering at the glance of triumphant malice which Robert had di-

rected towards the Moor as he concluded his speech.

Now, the Baron had ever considered the Red Knight to be of too reserved a nature to possess in any degree the gift of eloquence; he was therefore little prepared for the fluent harangue which followed. With the most consummate art did the speaker begin, by awakening in his bosom all the tender recollections of the days of his early youth, when they resided together in unrestrained friendship, and no suspicion or dark mistrust had for a moment marred the fond confidence which each reposed in the other. He then reverted to his aged father and his dying charge, which had so well bespoke the boundless trust he had placed in his honour. The eye of the young Baron moistened, as the memory of this event came over him, and in spite of appearances, his heart yearned towards his cousin, who had then proved his only friend.

It was then that, perceiving his advantage, Robert spoke of himself, of the high name which he had earned for valour in the army, of the rank which he held among the bright and matchless chivalry of France; and now, how fallen must he be! instead of sitting, as was his wont, in judgement by the side of Clodomir, he was compelled to stand to defend himself against the accusation of affording aid to the old hereditary enemies of his house. "And who, forsooth! was his accuser?—one meaner than the meanest hind, whose weary life was passed in unceasing toil and labour that others might reap the produce! ay, lower than the lowest churl who turned the furrow through the broad lands of La Morlaye! a worthless, unransomed Saracen prisoner, whose rightful place was the lowest dungeon of the castle-keep! a worshipper of Mahomed, accursed of all true Christians! a false and treacherous knave, in whom would be

found neither faith nor truth.—There was a time," he added, " when not even Charlemagne himself could have made La Morlaye doubt his cousin's honour; but that time was now passed, and Robert the Red must be strangely altered, that the first word from the lips of the vilest of slaves is sufficient to condemn him unheard, and to cause the memory of all past affection to be forgotten in an instant !"

Clodomir would listen no longer; starting from the high chair in which he was placed, he sprang down the steps, and seizing his cousin's hand with a passionate grasp, exclaimed,

" Say not so, Robin ! say not so ! may I perish ere I forget all thy kind love for me ! I know thou canst clear thyself of this foul charge, but, by Saint Denis ! it were idle waste of words to condescend to prove that with which we are all so well acquainted. I see the error; it is Hybelin who has stolen the

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dagger, if I had possessed my father's discernment, I had known that from the first. Come to my heart again, Robin! here do I embrace thee! and may nothing ever chance to mar our love!"

La Morlaye fondly drew the Red Knight to his bosom, who, heartily glad to be so easily rid of the inquiry, returned his cousin's embrace with more warmth than he was accustomed to exhibit. Clodomir was delighted at the feeling which he manifested, and thinking the moment propitious, whispered in his ear,—

"Let thy accuser now depart scathless, and thy triumph will be complete. He is but a lad, and has been led away by the greatness of his love for my Lady. I pray thee forgive him, for my sake; remember how bravely he rescued the young Clarion, the boy whom thou hast oftentimes told me thou didst love with a fondness little less than my own."

Robert's countenance grew fierce and dark, yet he answered not, and La Morlaye gathering hope, proceeded,

"I know thou hast already forgiven him in thy heart; thy silence denoteth compliance with my request; I thank thee from my soul, Robin! thou hast indeed acted a noble part this day!" He then turned, and ere Robert could check him, called aloud,

"Guards, throw wide the doors; the audience is at an end; let each depart, fully satisfied that the Knight of the Bleeding Heart is wholly innocent of the treason laid to his charge; and hark ye, let no foul whisperings of slander be heard amongst ye; they will incur my severest displeasure who disobey this command. Thou, Moor, mayest likewise depart, and be thankful that the God whom the Christians worship has inclined a Christian's heart to be merciful towards thee. Albeit thy intentions

were the best, yet had my kinsman dealt with thee according to our law, torture, fierce and dire, would have been thy award. But his generous soul scorns such a mean revenge on a powerless enemy, and thou canst not be too grateful for his kindly forbearance."

"Hold!" exclaimed the Red Knight, in a voice which reverberated like thunder through the lofty arches of the hall; "close again the doors! let none depart, but tarry all! and witness the accuser himself brought to judgement."

"How!" exclaimed Clodomir, "didst thou not promise?—nay, I prithee deal not harshly with the lad; he has been over rash, but he is, in sooth, wholly guileless of treason."

"I cry you mercy!" said the Red Knight, with a bitter sneer; "that indeed were a knightly crime, and one in which he has no share. That of which I would accuse him is far more suited to his capacity."

La Morlaye turned a look full of inquiry upon the Moor, but could observe nothing in his demeanour by which to solve the mystery. The youth had maintained the same cold indifference during the whole of this extraordinary scene, and, excepting the slight hectic flush that tinged his rich brown cheek at the opprobrious epithets which the Red Knight had applied to him, his countenance was calm and placid, as though he were an uninterested spectator of all that was passing.

Robert remained silent, till the confusion occasioned by his countermand of the Baron's orders had subsided; and then, walking up the steps of the judgement-seat, followed by the astonished Clodomir, he placed himself in the high chair which it was his wont to occupy. As if willing that La Morlaye should be the first sharer in his secret, he bent forward, and whispered for a moment in his ear. Meanwhile a sad and melancholy expression overcame the

manly features of the latter, and when Robert pointed to the dagger, he started in evident surprise, while a glance of indignation shot from his azure eye towards the page, who appeared to be the subject of their conference. When this was at an end, the Baron, manifestly under the guidance of the Red Knight, was the first to speak.

" Saracen !" he began in a subdued tone, " there is a charge against thee which Heaven grant thee aid to wipe away ! and—"

" Nay, nay," interrupted Robert hastily, feeling the full force of the appealing look of conscious innocence with which the Moor had already answered this address, and fearing it might have the same effect upon Clodomir : " it were wiser to be brief; methinks I could conduct this case somewhat better than thou, Clodomir, seeing that I possess not all thy tender feelings."

He then, before Clodomir could reply, addressed the Moor; and in a tone of savage triumph, demanded by what token he knew that he bore the dagger, when he set out for the chase on the day before mentioned.

"There is a warder's horn at the portal of La Morlaye, but Sir Robert useth it not," returned the Moor; "the hilt of his dagger is struck on the gate, and the warder appeareth quickly at the summons."

"Thou sayest right, thou sayest right, Moor," cried Robert in a joyful tone; "well do I remember it: of a truth thou hast most excellent vision. I marvel much that thou dost not use it better for thine own advantage. And prithee, how dost thou mean to prove that this dagger is the same which thou didst then behold? These are times when, albeit a Knight have many weapons, he may not be overburthened."

The youth hesitated; he felt that his fate

hung upon his answer; he knew of the absence of the blazing jewel, and with his quick discernment, he had instantly perceived to what conclusion the Red Knight was hastening; but the next moment, indignant with himself, he shook off his embarrassment, and fearlessly answered,

"The sun shone fair that day, and the ruby on the hilt flashed vivid as the forked lightning."

A fiend-like smile played upon the lip of Robert, and his eyes gleamed with ferocious exultation, as he exclaimed in a tone of fury,

"Thou craven, felon, slave! say, where is that ruby now?"

He held the dagger above his head, when, alas! it was but too plainly evident to all that the matchless jewel, which rendered it a gift so worthy the great Prince by whom it was bestowed, had disappeared, and the rude

setting, which had encircled the stone, was now all that remained of its former splendour.

The assembly gazed in silent sorrow, for it was now manifest that, whether guilty or innocent, the Moor had fallen into the power of Robert the Red, to whom mercy was unknown, and who would not fail to gratify his revenge, by pronouncing the severest judgement.

"And so," proceeded the Knight, burning with rage, that no answer was returned to the gratified smile with which he gazed around. "And so, Moor, thou art at last discovered for a mean and cowardly caitiff! Of a truth, thou art marvellous quick in thy proceedings. Since thy feigned interest, and artful hypocrisy, could not procure thy freedom, thou wert determined to obtain it by surer means. Thou knowest, Clodomir," he continued, turning to the astonished Baron,

" that to purchase liberty, these Pagans would willingly risk even life itself. Seest thou not the whole manœuvre? There be Jews enough, Heaven knows! who would readily turn into golden merks any thing of value which he might purloin. Ha! dost mark his visage now? Nature has not made his skin so dark, but that the blush of confusion may yet be visible."

Clodomir started as the crimson tide spread over the face and neck of the Moor, and a deep sigh escaped him at this fresh proof of guilt; while Robert, perceiving it, whispered hurriedly in his ear, " Name quickly the death he is to die; let us use no delay; 'twere a sorry example to our own vassals, those born on our own soil, if thou wert now to let him escape."

" Stay!" replied Clodomir, resisting the artful counsel of his cousin; " though great has been the Moor's guilt, yet will we endea-

vour to be merciful, seeing that we ourselves value liberty far beyond life. Let him now but produce the jewel of which he has despoiled thee, and albeit we can no longer put faith and confidence in him, and suffer him to go at large, yet will we not take his life, but hold him, as we should have done at first in strict durance, awaiting with patience the arrival of his ransom."

"Nay, 'twere useless bidding him confess! Hast thou not learned that nothing, save torture, could ever wring confession from one of his race?" interrupted Robert angrily: "let us essay the fiery ordeal; 'tis not slow of preparation, and perchance we might extort—"

"How!" exclaimed the Baron, starting upon his feet in evident disgust: "doth my kinsman counsel me to disgrace my father's name by such ruthless barbarity? Of a truth such a deed would be accursed even of the ignorant

infidel. Look, Robin, at his frail limbs and slender form, and say if thou thinkest they be fitted to endure the torture. Methinks thou art somewhat harsh in thy measures. Deal more kindly towards him, I beseech thee; so will he spread thy fame throughout the far-off Moslem land; and there be many, even there, who would duly value thy forbearance. Thou canst not surely have forgotten Aben Malek! that generous Saracen, who suffered us to bear thee, all wounded, from the field, nor claimed thee as his prisoner, although my Barony itself would not have been withheld to redeem thee."

Clodomir paused; for a truth which, in after times, would often excite his wonder that it should have escaped him thus long, flashed upon his mind; it was the resemblance of the youth who stood before him to the noble and powerful chieftain whom he had just named.

In vain he endeavoured to persuade himself that such were the characteristic features of his race, and that all must, in some degree, partake of the likeness. The arched and lofty brow, with the glittering jet-black eye beneath; the curved lip and haughty smile, all were Aben Malek's, and the more he gazed the more was he convinced that it was a son of that renowned warrior whom he now beheld in El Adhel, the lowly page of La Morlaye. He dwelt with interest on each feature of the boy, as it recalled to mind the proud Moorish noble, who, by his disinterested generosity, might have shamed many a pious Christian; but the current of his reflections was interrupted by the Red Knight's answer, in which rage and disappointed revenge were evident.

"It is well," said he; "thou sayest well, Clodomir; his form is frail and tender, and

yet, ha, ha ! he could disarm a bold and sturdy forest robber !"

The Baron was puzzled, but he nevertheless would not believe El Adhel guilty. There was but one way left of serving the page, and saving him from the dreadful fate to which Robert's vindictive malice had doomed him ; this was, to feign entire conviction of his unworthiness, and to yield to the suggestions of the Red Knight's vengeance, whereby he would gain time to examine the Moor, and if, as he strongly suspected, he proved to belong to Aben Malek, then did he securely hope the father's name alone would to Robert, who owed life and freedom to the chieftain's generosity, be sufficient guarantee for the innocence of the son.

Accordingly, as if at once convinced by the force of the Red Knight's argument, La Morlaye, with well-dissembled passion, while his

heart secretly smote him at his apparent injustice, exclaimed in a loud tone,

"Of a truth, Robin, I owe thee many thanks for thy penetration!—Who now can have a doubt of the treacherous intent of this Saracen? Away with him to the deepest dungeon of the keep! To-morrow, if he produce not the jewel, we will pronounce a doom whereby he shall become a warning to all who shall be guilty of the like felon deed!"

He trusted not himself to turn a look upon the Moor while speaking; but the bustle of the men-at-arms, as they advanced to execute their master's orders, and bear away the page, already began to shake his resolution. "Stay!" cried he hurriedly, "if I said the deepest dungeon of the keep, I meant it not. The cells are cold and damp, seeing they have been in small request since my father's time. Convey him to the prison-chamber in the western tur-

ret, where he will not lack either light or air. Thou wilt not refuse him this indulgence, Robin; for at thy request it was granted to the robber whom we captured a short time since, and albeit the caitiff succeeded in escaping by some unknown means, yet, methinks, our Saracen will have small chance of escape elsewhere than into the castle-moat; and the chamber being so near thine, there will be no need of a sentinel."

Meanwhile the guards proceeded to seize the young Moor; but it was not till they had reached the door of the apartment that La Morlaye turned, anxious to see how El Adhel would bear this apparent change in his destiny. His astonishment was great to find that he even now betrayed not the least emotion, save when his eye met that of his master, and then his lip curled into an expression of undisguised contempt.

"By Saint Denis!" muttered the Baron to himself, as the last sound of the rattling armour of the guards died away in the distance, "how that glance reminds me of Aben Malek! such was the look he gave in answer to my offer of ransom for my cousin." He beckoned to his esquire, and when the latter drew near he whispered in his ear, "Raoul, hie thee quickly after the men-at-arms, bid them forbear to load the Moor with chains, or to treat him otherwise with harshness. And do thou thyself see that he have all things fitting for his comfort, or he will be little able to bear the audience of to-morrow: he is of tender years, and scarcely fit to abide chains and prison fare."

The kind-hearted Raoul joyfully departed upon his mission, and Clodomir, who wished for a while to escape converse with Robert, and even from his own reflections, with a kind of forced gaiety exclaimed, "Come, Robin, art still

inclined to wager that thy hawk Barbette is a better bird than mine? What sayest thou now to a flight down the valley? It will decide our contest, and help to chase away the care and grief which have assailed us this unhappy morn. Let us summon de Loménie; he left the hall just after the jewel was missed from thy dagger, and is doubtless gone to seek the Lady Blanche. I must not join them, for my Lady will doubtless weep at the fate of her page; and, 'fore God, my mind has dwelt enough on tears and torture this day!"

The Red Knight showed the greatest alacrity in seconding a resolution so favourable to himself, and, shortly after, the three Knights, with their attendants, were seen galloping up the hill, and although they each had secret cause of uneasiness, they were at the greatest pains to conceal it, taking as much apparent interest in the chances of the royal sport on

which they were bent, as though nothing had happened to weigh more heavily on their minds than the possibility that the Baron's favourite merlin might be beaten in flight by his cousin's hawk, the renowned Barbette.

CHAPTER VII.

THESE were briefly the events which caused all the sorrow of the Lady Blanche, making her so bitterly lament, that by an overweening confidence in the Baron's indulgence and generosity, she should have suffered him to remain in ignorance of the arrival of El Adhel's ransom; and never did the joyous note of Clodomir's horn sound so sweetly in her ear as when it announced his return on the evening of this eventful day.

With her whole soul bent upon saving the page from death, and her husband's name from

dishonour, she rushed forward to meet him, and heedless of the presence of Robert, with an energy that somewhat startled the Baron, implored that ere sentence was passed upon the Moor, he would listen to a disclosure which she could make respecting him.

It was not in the power of Clodomir to resist a request from the Lady Blanche, and already prepossessed in favour of the Moor by the promptings of his own heart, he readily acceded, and followed to her chamber, fully hoping that something might yet occur before the morrow to exonerate the Moor in Robert's eyes. But who shall attempt to describe the tumult of emotion with which he listened to the full confirmation of what he had himself already more than half suspected? Joy at El Adhel's good fortune, mingled with admiration of the youth's disinterested, though misplaced, zeal, and gratitude to Heaven for having been spared

the everlasting shame which the death of a ransomed prisoner would have cast upon his name, took alternate possession of his bosom.

Nor yet was the Red Knight forgotten. Although little dreaming of the value of the captive, when he had made the vow to bestow the whole of the ransom upon his cousin, yet not one sigh escaped him at the unexpected richness of the prize he had lost; it might rather be said that he was overwhelmed with delight at his unworthy relative's sudden acquisition of wealth and importance. His sole regret, if he felt any, was the having put it beyond his own power to refuse at once all ransom, and thus act with the same generosity which Aben Malek had done towards him who had so eagerly sought the prisoner's life. He felt as though he now had no wish ungratified. Robert was by this simple event rendered wealthier than the proudest Chatelains of the forest. Fortune had at length

granted, when least expected, what had so long been denied to his loyalty and courage.

"By Saint Denis!" he exclaimed, chuckling with glee as he thought on this happy event, "Robin has now small lack of any thing save a loving wife, and I should marvel greatly if the old castle of Croix, which he will doubtless make his own, were long to stand in need of a gentle mistress. And merrily may we all dance at his bridal! although, be it remembered, we have but ill deserved the good chances which have thus fallen upon us, seeing that to dream of felony in the son of Aben Malek, were little short of felony itself. How will our cousin be surprised! think of his look, Blanchette, when we bring forth the bags of gold with which thou sayest the Jew is laden! Ha! ha! a sudden thought has struck me; I have a scheme, the which, if we could but put in practice, would make us merry for a year to

come. It is this: thy father departs to-night: let the Moor then leave the castle, and under cover of the numerous train will he traverse the dark forest in safety. To-morrow, when Robin demands the prisoner, let us produce the wealth of which the former will so soon become master. Ha! ha! thinkest thou he will repine at the change?"

Merrily laughed the thoughtless young couple as the idea of Robert's overturned gravity presented itself to their minds. Pure and unfeigned was the joy of each: La Morlaye rejoiced with all the generosity of a loving heart at the happiness awaiting one who had always been so dear, while the Lady Blanche welcomed with delight the hope of Robert's speedy departure from the castle, when all fear for the safety of those she loved would be removed from her troubled mind.

Little could they imagine the feelings of

him who was now the object of their fond solicitude, and who, in his way to his distant chamber, paused to listen betwixt curiosity and fear to the peals of uncontrolled merriment which reached his ear.

"Laugh on," he muttered to himself, "fools that ye are! I doubt not ye have hit upon some wise scheme to save the Moor, and it is this that causeth your mirth; but ye are deceived; he is mine *now*,—wholly mine,—and I myself were an idiot to let him escape. Little think ye how ye have thrust him, of your own accord, into my power. Your aid, whatever it be, comes somewhat over late. I myself will make sure of the keen-sighted knave, lest even now his hawk-eye might mar our projects of to-night. Laugh on while yet ye may!—small cause will ye have to rejoice in the morn, the which your swarthy favourite shall not live to see!"

The proposition that Clodomir had made being at once agreed to by the Lady Blanche, there remained but to admit the Sire de Loménie into the secret. This was quickly done, and the old knight, after wondering at his daughter's alacrity in disclosing the fact of the Moor's freedom to her husband, resolved to let his retinue proceed without him, and to remain till the morrow to witness how Robert would receive the news of the good fortune which had befallen him. Each of these three kind-hearted beings felt rejoiced at the change in the Red Knight's destiny; he was regarded by them as injured and neglected by those to whom his valour had been of such important service, and they were secretly pleased that he had at length gained wherewithal to maintain his rank without having to seek aid whence it had been so long denied.

We will pass over the anxiety of the Lord

and Lady of La Morlaye, with the busy mysterious importance of de Loménie during the rest of the day, and hasten to make our readers acquainted with the little that remains to be told ere our story be concluded.

It had been arranged that Clodomir himself should not seek El Adhel till all was ready for his departure, and this should not take place till after sunset, lest, the prison-chamber being so near to that of Robert, he might be perceived by the latter repairing thither. It was thus that, taking a pretended farewell of La Morlaye, the Sire de Loménie left the castle with his numerous train, to abide on the neighbouring hill the arrival of the Moor, when he himself would return and await the events of the morrow. No sooner were the gates closed on the well-mounted band, than, notwithstanding the early hour, Robert, pleading fatigue, withdrew to his own apartment. This was consi-

dered by the Baron to be a fortunate circumstance, as it led him to hope that ere long he would be buried in repose, and that he should be thus enabled to pass his chamber-door without observation.

The Lady Blanche had insisted on lending her aid in this adventure, the romance of which had in the morning seized on her youthful imagination and excited an eager wish to bear a part in it; but, as the time drew near, and she had to await alone in her chamber the arrival of Clodomir, she felt, she knew not why, a weight upon her spirits which she had little expected. In vain did she endeavour to shake it off; a thousand vague apprehensions of evil from the vigilance of Robert made her reflect with regret on the task they had undertaken.

She turned to the casement for relief: the death-like silence of all without served to increase the melancholy which had stolen over

her. Twilight was fast giving place to darkness; the moon had just risen, and the pale beams of its silvery crescent contrasted mournfully with the long line of golden light which showed where the sun had set in gorgeous splendour. Not a footstep was heard in the court-yard; the hinds were all engaged at their evening meal: the Baron himself had not as yet left the banquet, and the distant laugh of the rude serfs from the kitchen below, as the coarse jest or merry tale went round, served but to make the silence which ensued appear more sad and lonely. She closed the casement with a sigh, and again seated herself to count the weary moments. Clotilde, in a closet adjoining, was employed in lulling to rest the young Sir Clarion, and she now began to chaunt, in a low plaintive voice, a wild and melancholy legend of the house of Loménie, every word of which, at this silent hour, fell with fearful

distinctness on the ear of the shuddering lady.

It was the story of the lovely and hapless Basilde, who, concealed in a friar's dress, had prepared to elope from her father's castle with her lover, a young minstrel of lowly birth and mean estate, but whose handsome person and lively wit, joined to his wondrous skill in song, had won the maiden's heart; but, alas! they were surprised by a warder ere they had reached the postern-door, of which the damsel had the key, and each being ignorant of the watchword, were shot dead in each other's arms by a bolt from his heavy arbalist.

The Lady Blanche had heard the ballad a hundred times before. Often and often, when an infant, had she been lulled to sleep by its music, in her own happy home at Loménie, but never till now had she listened to it with such intense interest; and when Clotilde sang the verse detailing the particulars of

the unhappy maiden's disguise, she looked down upon her own dark cloak and heavy mufflers with something like horror at the resemblance.

Clotilde proceeded,

" She pauses not, though the midnight owl
Hoots loud, from the ruined tower;
She heeds not the mastiff's dismal howl,
But conceals her fair face in the friar's dark cowl,
And in silence steals down from her bower.

" Ah! woe to thee! woe to thee, maiden bright!
The screech-owl ne'er bodeth good,
She hath warning of murder ere morning's light!
And hark! the bold mastiff e'en howls with affright,
For he scenteth the victim's blood!"

Here the singer was suddenly interrupted, for a mournful and protracted howl, sounding at such a moment almost unearthly, rose from the court-yard below, and floated on the still night-breeze with melancholy effect. A voice was then heard, endeavouring by a soothing

whisper to pacify the irritated animal, and soon all was again quiet, except when at intervals, the faithful hound sent forth a low discontented growl, as though the cause of his uneasiness were not yet removed.

This simple coincidence, trifling as it may appear, now increased the agitation of the Lady Blanche almost to terror; and scarcely pausing to think on what she did, she called loudly on Clotilde to come forth from the chamber. The obedient damsel quickly made her appearance, but spoke not; and to the Lady's reiterated question of whether she had heard the noise below, she returned no answer, but remained motionless, with her eyes fixed in mute horror upon her mistress.

"Silly maiden!" exclaimed the Lady, endeavouring to conceal her own fears, "thou canst not surely be thus affrighted at the mere baying of a hound!"

"No, my Lady," returned Clotilde, after several vain efforts to speak, "it is not the noise alone which has thus alarmed me, but, alas! were I to tell the sight I have just beheld, it would fill my Lady's mind with affright, even as it has done mine own."

"In Heaven's name, what hast thou beheld?" exclaimed the Baroness gasping for breath.

"Oh, my Lady!" returned Clotilde, "I was sitting rocking Sir Clarion and singing the legend of Loménie, when just as I had reached the nurse's warning there arose such a dismal—"

"Well, well! I ask not that," interrupted the Lady impatiently, "I know well, it was a hound in the court-yard; but say quickly, what didst thou see?"

"So please you, my Lady, thinking it might be young Raoul, my Lord's esquire, loosening the hounds for the night, I opened the case-

ment, and beheld, not Raoul, but a man standing, as if fearing to pass where Belle-patte was chained. The next moment I heard a voice encouraging him to advance, and eagerly endeavouring to still the mastiff by caresses. I saw not the figure of the speaker, he stood under the parapet; but truly, as our Lady is in Heaven, do I believe it to have been Sir Robert the Red! I knew his voice, my Lady; I could not be mistaken, so distinctly did I hear each word he uttered, 'Fool!' said he, 'thou wilt alarm the whole castle; pass quickly, while I hold the hound!' I know not what answer was returned, but the man raised his head to note if any were observing him; and, judge of my horror! nay, faint not, my Lady! —he disclosed the well-known features of—of—Hybelin!"

"Ha!" exclaimed the Lady with a faint shriek, "thou sayest not so, Clotilde! we must

alarm the Baron! no one has yet retired to rest; we must—nay, nay, I am a fool—it could not be—thou hast mistaken, girl; thy fears have misled thee!"

"Would I could think it, my Lady!" returned Clotilde; "but the moon shone full on Hybelin's face, and it is not a visage easily forgotten! And, alas! although I saw not the face of the other, yet it was too surely Sir Robert; for when he stooped low to appease Belle-patte, the plumes of his morion fell over the snow-white neck and breast of the noble hound, and plainly showed the fearful blood-red!"

"Oh, Clodomir! Clodomir!" exclaimed the Lady Blanche, bursting into a flood of tears, thou wouldst not believe me! and thou hast punished by a dungeon the faithful page who ventured to expose the villainy of this caitiff Knight!"

" My Lady will pardon the boldness of her humble but loving servant," said Clotilde ; " but if I were allowed to judge, methinks it is even the page himself who is now in the greatest danger ; for young Raoul, who watched Sir Robert well, after the audience this morning, declared to me, my Lady, that the Knight appeared suddenly transported with joy at my Lord's determination to confine the Moor in the turret ; which, although meant in kindness, filled all their hearts with grief, as none can fail to remember the marvellous escape of the robber thence, without aid from bolt or bar ; the loop-hole hard to climb, and the moat directly beneath. Who could think on these things, and not harbour suspicion ? I tremble already, lest my Lord should not have sought the poor boy's chamber in time. Holy Virgin ! watch over him, albeit he is a Pagan, and save him from the Red Knight's fury."

The Lady Blanche mused awhile, in doubt and terror; her heart beat thick, as she reflected, that if the sturdy Squire's suspicions were well founded, the generous Moor might even at that very moment be grappling for life and death with his savage and ruthless enemy. She thought not of him then as the faithful, obedient page, ever ready to obey her slightest wish; she thought not of him as El Adhel, the idolized heir of the proud and wealthy Moorish noble, whose ransom was far richer than any which a Christian nation could offer for its King; she remembered him only as the preserver of her child, and with a mother's grateful love she wept and trembled for his safety.

It was not long before Clodomir returned; yet, alas! his high spirits and joyous countenance but ill accorded with the present state of her feelings; and although anticipating disbelief, she ventured to lay before him the

whole of Clotilde's statement. The Baron goodnaturedly heard her to the end; and when she had ceased speaking,—"Tut, tut!" said he, half-laughing, half-angry, "thy Clotilde hath ever some tale of marvel to recount; and, but that we heed her not, would now mar the best scheme of mirth that was ever planned."

"Oh, think not now of mirth, dearest Clodomir," said the Baroness; "'twere small cause of merriment if the poor Saracen should fall a victim to our delay. Hie thee quickly, with thy men at arms, and release him. Of a truth, I shall find it somewhat hard to smile till he be set at liberty."

"If thou sayest so, we must, indeed, use all despatch; seeing, that thy smile, Blanchette, is ever what I most delight to behold."

"Thou wilt not surely go alone?" said the Lady, in alarm; "think, love, there may

be danger; thou knowest not who is there—thou —"

" No, by Saint Denis ! I go not quite alone, thou hast promised me thy protection," said the Baron, laughing heartily.

" But may we not have Raoul with us? he is true and brave, and doth never draw back if his aid be wanting."

" Ay, ay, he is true and brave enough, but has not the step of a fairy; the clank of his heavy tread would waken Robin, and spoil our joke at last, after all the pains we have taken to keep it secret."

The Lady still hesitated; but at that moment the young Clarion in the adjoining closet, on awakening and finding himself alone, began to weep and call aloud for El Adhel, the page, who had ever been ready to fly to his side at the slightest summons. This appeal went instantly to the mother's heart, and forgetting all

thought of danger, she remembered only that each moment lost might be fatal to the gentle being who had restored to her fond bosom the child on whom all her earthly hopes were set.

Her resolution taken, she no longer offered opposition to the Baron's wish, and prepared to leave her chamber, bidding Clotilde soothe the boy till her return; to which Clodomir, whose merry mood nothing could damp, added a promise to restore El Adhel quickly, if he were not already killed and eaten by Red Robert.

As they proceeded to the turret, the Lady Blanche perceived with pleasure that the night was in reality not so far advanced as she had imagined. All had not yet retired for the night, for the distant sound of voices announced that a few revellers were still left, enjoying their protracted wassail, in the lower offices of the castle. These circumstances, combined

with the light and thoughtless gaiety of Clodomir, who was wholly bent on the amusement which his cousin's surprise would occasion him on the morrow, soon began to dispel her fears; and endeavouring to think Clotilde might have been mistaken, she regretted having suffered the foolish fancies of her bower-woman to obtain such mastery over her mind. But this renewal of courage lasted only till they had reached the entrance of the dark and gloomy corridor which led to the prison-chamber, and then, in spite of herself, her fears in some measure returned; for here Clodomir was fain to repress his gaiety, fearing to alarm Robert, whose chamber-door he would have to pass, and the silence and loneliness of the place excited anew all her nervous apprehensions, and made her unconsciously draw closer to her husband.

They had almost gained the chamber where

slumbered the Red Knight, when Clodomir suddenly paused and listened intently, for he fancied that he had heard other footsteps than those of the fairy being by his side, and, but that he would not give way to what he deemed womanish fears, a noise like the closing of a door had grated harshly upon his ears. Now again all was silent, and after waiting for a few moments he proceeded. But those were times when the strongest minds were not entirely free from superstition, and he involuntarily quickened his pace, nor trusted himself to turn a look back upon the gloomy space which he had left behind.

As they stopped at the prison door, the Lady Blanche, whose impatience had been gradually increasing, unable longer to control it, eagerly sprang up to look through the small grating through which prisoners had received their food in former times, and with more ruthless

gaolers than Clodomir. Her heart beat almost audibly as she strained her aching sight to discern the figure of the Moor in the apartment. But she saw him not. Although the moonbeams shone brightly through the high loophole, the low pallet prepared for his repose was beyond its influence, and the eye in vain sought a distinct outline amid the broad mass of shadow thrown by a projection of the wall over the corner in which it was placed. The richly decorated bow, with the crescent-studded quiver, were distinctly visible, hung against the wall, and recalled to mind the happy freedom which he had once enjoyed, while the huge iron rings fastened in the stone floor made her think with a sigh of where he now was, and for whose sake he had been confined there. What would she not have given but to hear him breathe? —but no! in vain did she check her own respiration to listen,—the deepest silence reigned

around, and only served to heighten her dread and apprehension.

She was, however, recalled from her reverie by the Baron, who required her aid in holding the lamp, while he proceeded to unlock the door.

The key grated harshly in the lock, as the Baron's whole strength was employed to turn it, and soon the massive iron-bound door creaked mournfully as it swung back on its rusty hinges. The adventurers paused not on the threshold—no, not an instant; as if the solemn stillness had produced the same effect upon the mind of each, they sprang with one accord to the couch of the sleeping Moor.

Even Clodomir could not repress an exclamation of pleasure, as the page was discovered, on the approach of the lamp, stretched on the pallet in a calm and death-like repose. "How deep and placid are his slumbers!" said he, as

he stooped low to trace anew the features of Aben Malek in those of the captive; "nor guilt nor fear could repose in such confident security."

"He was in truth more vigilant when danger menaced our sweet child," returned the Lady Blanche. "Look at that smile, Clodomir," she continued, as the features of the youth were lighted up for an instant; "look at the warm smile that plays upon his lip!—Waking, thou hast ne'er beheld it there; but seest thou, in his dreams he re-visits the sunny land of his birth. Methinks even now fancy has borne him back to the happy home whence he has been so long an exile, and perchance beneath the spreading branches of the fragrant cassia he may be relating the tale of his captivity, while his loving sire hearkeneth with attentive ear, and his tender mother now weepeth over the sorrows of her child, and anon smileth with

joy at his return. See, Clodomir, said I not aright?" she pursued, as at that moment the hand of the Moor, which till then had been pressed upon his heart, slowly relaxed, and the golden purse that the Jew had brought glittered from between his half-closed fingers,—"see! they tell me it is a letter, breathing love and tenderness, from one who would doubtless yield her own life to save that of El Adhel."

"Hist!" said the Baron, "he is awaking. Albeit the Moors be overcome by sleep, yet is it short and light; a little rest sufficeth, as we have oftentimes found to our cost, being in this respect unlike the Christians, whose heavy long-continued slumbers have so often lost them the advantage."

He spoke truth, for the Moor suddenly awaking, started upon his feet in an instant. His first impulse was to lay his hand upon his dagger, but as if a glance sufficed to show the

nature of his visitors, the next moment he withdrew it, and made a low obeisance, as the Baron, placing his finger on his lip, motioned him to silence.

La Morlaye had hitherto thought himself surpassed by none in that calm dignified courage which sinks not in adversity, nor is too much elated by sudden good fortune: but it must be confessed that the self-possession of the Moor surprised him not a little. He listened, while Clodomir explained the motive of his visit, without betraying emotion; and when the latter had concluded, the simple exclamation with which he greeted the announcement of his freedom caused the tear to start in the eye of the Lady Blanche. "Allah be praised!" said he, "I even may yet live to behold my father!"

"And now, El Adhel," said the Baron, after expressing the warmest admiration at the

youth's generous conduct, "were it not wise to go and seek the Jew? Night wanes apace, and he doubtless awaiteth thy arrival with anxiety."

The Moor, with the same humility which he had displayed in the character of my Lady's page, took the lamp to light his master thither, when, suddenly turning to the Lady Blanche, the Baron exclaimed—

"Why, how pale thou art looking, Blanchette! I fear me the fatigue and watching have been more than thou couldst bear!"

"Hush!" said the Lady Blanche, "I was but listening to that sound: how sad and mournful it breaks upon the stillness of night. Ha! at Loménie they deem it the sign of death!"

They listened; it was the low and ominous note of the screech-owl from the turret above, and the flapping of her wings could be distinctly heard as she shrieked on her moss-grown perch.

"It is but the owl," said the Baron, after a pause: "she has been disturbed in her nest by the light. Praise be to Heaven, it is not often that this chamber has a tenant: she will cease as soon as the lamp is withdrawn. But, Blanche love, I like not that pallid cheek and heavy eye: thou must not encounter the cold damp air of the corridor: I fear me I have already taxed thee beyond thy frail strength; thou shalt abide here, dearest, till our return: the chamber of the Jew is nigh at hand, and think not we will tarry, but rather hasten to release so fair a captive."

The Lady Blanche offered no opposition to this. Worn out by fatigue and heartily tired of the adventure, she rejoiced at the prospect of even a few moments' repose; but yet, when she beheld the Baron take up the lamp to depart, her agitation was so evident that it caused him to pause.

" Be not afraid, sweet love," said he; " the moon shineth brightly, and all is clear as noonday. In truth, thou wouldst make but a sorry Lady-errant. We will return quickly — fare thee well but for an instant, dearest love !"

Thus saying, he gently closed the door, and the Lady Blanche heard the key turn in the lock with a feeling of security, which was increased when casting her eyes round the apartment, she discovered that every crevice and corner was rendered distinctly visible by the brightness of the moonbeams through the loop-hole. For a while she paced to and fro, and at length, exhausted by long-continued watching, after looking around for a seat, she sank on the couch from which the Moor had so lately arisen.

Here she buried her face amid the ample folds of the dark mantle in which she was enveloped, and while thus lying in comparative ease and security, she soon began to smile at the silly

fears which had so wellnigh overcome her courage. Clodomir had spoken truth, the owl was heard no more, and thus Clotilde's ballad, with all its evil omens, was fast fading from her mind. The apartment was small and low—one glance could take in its whole extent; nor was there the smallest recess to which the most superstitious fancy could affix any idea of mystery or importance: each object stood in bold and distinct outline, and removed all those fearful impressions which absolute darkness might otherwise have produced. The door was made fast; La Morlaye had possession of the key, and could she be more safe than under his charge? She was now at the summit of her wishes: the Moor was free; no stain could attach to the name of La Morlaye; it would still descend a fair and spotless heritage to Clarion; and above all, what most contributed to her returning peace of mind, was the reflection that ere long Robert the Red would seek

another home, and his absence restore to her bosom that serenity to which she would ever be a stranger while he remained an inmate of the castle.

While musing thus, the loneliness of her situation was soon forgotten, and all remembrance of danger banished from her mind, until at last, screened from the chill night air by the heavy-furred mantle, and lulled by the gentle rippling of the distant waters below, her ideas began to crowd hurriedly and confusedly through her brain, while each impression became less and less vivid. Events which had so recently taken place seemed to fade from her memory, and she finally sank into a sound slumber, rendered doubly deep by the fatigue which she had previously undergone.

Soon did fancy, as is usual, when the mind has been harassed, begin to run riot in that of the beautiful sleeper; painting each illusion

with all the truth and freshness of reality. She dreamed that she was walking on the ramparts of the castle with the young Clarion; the day was hot and sultry, not a breath of air fanned her cheek, as she bent listlessly over the wall to catch a glimpse of the cool and shining moat beneath. Heedless of what was passing around, she remained gazing on the pure and limpid waters, and longing with all that earnestness, so forcible in a dream, for a single drop wherewith to cool her parched and fevered lips, until, aroused by a loud shriek, she turned—and, oh! what a sight met her horror-stricken gaze! her boy had climbed the wall in play, and stood upright upon the high parapet. She would have sprung forward to his aid, but it seemed as if some invisible power kept her rooted to the spot. She essayed to call for help, but her voice died away in her throat, and her lips would utter no sound. Suddenly

the Red Knight appeared in sight,—she could only point with trembling finger to the danger of her child; he rushed forward as if to save him—already did she invoke a blessing on his head—when, with a hideous yell he stretched forth his arm, and in an instant the boy had disappeared.

She collected her whole strength, and flew with a desperate effort to the spot; but alas! too late. She heard with fearful distinctness the heavy splash below; she bent forward in despair to look over the wall! The last golden ringlet of her beauteous boy was just seen to glitter above the flood — another moment, that too had passed away; and the waters closed over him calm and placid as before.

With the frenzy of maternal anguish she would have plunged headlong after him, but was forcibly held back by the Red Knight, whose eyes flashed with savage delight, as he

drew his countenance close to her's, and with fiendish glee laughed aloud at the mischief he had done. She struggled with such violence to free herself from his grasp, that she suddenly awoke, with a painful sense of suffocation, as of some heavy weight upon her bosom.

She made an effort to rise, but in vain; it seemed as though she were held down to the pallet by force: she at first imagined herself to be still under the influence of the dream, and it was not till after repeated endeavours to rise that she became conscious of the presence of another person in the chamber. She now too perceived with horror that the cloak must be purposely held down, or how should she be thus restrained from moving? Her heart beat, as though it would have burst from her bosom—she essayed to scream—in an instant the weight which had hung upon her chest, flew to her

mouth, and proved to be the firm and heavy pressure of an enormous hand.

She lay paralysed with terror while a hundred ideas floated through her mind: it was some idle jest of the Baron's to alarm her—it was the Moor—it was the Jew;—ah, no, her husband's hand would never press thus rudely, nor the Moor, nor the Jew, would dare to be thus familiar! If neither of these, oh God! who was it then? and why spoke they not? She did not long remain in doubt of the dreadful truth; and no language can describe the sensation of horror which ran through her frame, as the voice of the hateful, the detested Hybelin, rang in her ears.

"Loose him not," said he in a hurried tone; "loose not the cloak, Sir Knight, ere he be silenced for ever! A single shriek might reach the ears of the vigilant warder on the battlements without."

" Fear not, Hybelin," returned Robert the Red, for such the deep tones of the speaker announced him to be : " I have him in my grasp ; he will find it somewhat hard to stir from the couch ; and trust me, no sound will he be enabled ever more to utter, save alone the last death-rattle, with which I hope he will gladden our ears ere long."

" Loiter not, I pray you, Sir Knight," returned Hybelin ; " remember we have much to accomplish ere the dawn ; lose no time in despatching the Moor—here is the trusty dagger :—Behold ! plunge it close beneath yon large dark fold, and I warrant me it will not fail to find his heart."

A cold shudder came over the Lady Blanche, the blood froze in her veins, as she felt the Red Knight withdraw his hand to stretch it forth to receive the weapon, and collecting her whole strength, she profited by the circum-

stance to renew her struggles with more violence than ever; but alas! the iron hand of Red Robert moved not from her lips, and she exhausted herself in fruitless endeavours to enable him to distinguish the sound of her voice. Oh, God! and must she die, even now, this horrid death? Where was Clodomir, that he came not? Father of Mercies! she should never behold him more. There was madness in the thought, and her efforts for release became still more desperate.

"Ha, ha!" wildly laughed Red Robert—it was the same fiendish laugh which had disturbed her dream. "See, how he struggles, Hybelin; as if his puny strength could ever match a warrior's arm."

He knelt low, and whispered in her ear; she could hear his teeth grind while he spoke.

"Boy," said he, "I fear me we have disturbed thy slumbers; but it is only for an

instant, in a short time thou wilt sleep sounder than ever in the castle-moat; and be not afraid, thou wilt not pine for lack of company. Saracen! thou didst once save the life of the young heir of La Morlaye; 'twere pity thou thyself shouldst die in ignorance of his future fate. Know then, thou faithful fool! that ere night shall have waned away, the castle itself will have changed possessors, by the grace of God, as Charlemagne would say, and the help of the brave forest robbers, who have long ago called me Captain. Now, hie thee to my fond cousin; tell him 'twas I myself who told thee so; and he, and he — ha, ha! — he will consign thee to a dungeon for thy pains. But mark me, boy! thou wilt not die unavenged; thou hast cause for rejoicing, even in death: the dungeon of which thou hast been an inmate, shall become the prison of thy gaoler; the same dagger which pierceth thy heart, shall soon be wet

with the blood of his. Say, are not these good tidings? Doth it not gladden thy soul? Vengeance can brighten the death-hour. Oh, Saracen! it is Heaven to be revenged."

As he said this, he grasped the Lady with such rude violence, that she gasped for breath; but he heeded it not. She now lay in calm and hopeless despair, resigned to the dreadful fate which seemed inevitable. Unable to speak or move, by a single blow she might be launched in a moment from life and consciousness into darkness and death.

But the Red Knight appeared to exult with all the malice of his cruel nature, in prolonging the torture of his victim.

"And the child," he continued,—"the boy, whom thou hast loved so well,—in truth, my tender heart would grieve to part ye! when thou art gone, I fear he might come to harm; so, in kindness, I will soon send him to join thy

cold slumbers and thy watery bed. Ha! what! art determined to have another struggle for thy paltry remnant of life? Knowest thou not that none ever escaped from beneath the arm that now holds thee? Ho, there! look to him, Hybelin! he is bursting the cloak with the violence of his efforts to get free: lay thy hand upon his feet, or he will force them through the camlet."

"By Heaven! he is gaining strength. Why do you dally thus, Sir Knight?" cried Hybelin; "if he were once to loosen the cloak, I would not answer for the issue; he has the very activity of the antelope and —"

"Tut, tut!" said Robert, "his quickness will be of small avail now! is it not Robert the Red who has him in his grasp? I tarry but to let him know the fate of those whose love he has sought so long with unremitting zeal."

Again he turned to the hapless Lady Blanche, and continued:

"Doth it not rejoice thee, boy, to learn that thy young favourite will be so well cared for? Nay, struggle not thus fiercely! Say, am I not gentle and kind-hearted? I feared that, lacking thy eagle-eye to watch over him, some evil chance might befall him. Nay, who can tell?—ha, ha!—he might even be borne off by robbers to the forest; and so:—But no matter—enough, that thou shouldst be well assured he will not long delay to join thee. And the Lady of La Morlaye, I speak not much of her; the castle would be drear enough without a mistress: moreover, methinks she would not love to resign her rights; and I would pledge my right hand, that ere another moon she will still be the bride of the Lord of La Morlaye, if he choose to woo her. For well do I know the grief of woman: her eye is

oft bedimmed with tears for the loss of the one love, while her lip weareth the ready smile to win the heart of another; and fear not, there shall be wassail at our bridal that shall startle even thee from thy death-bound slumbers."

Robert paused for a moment, and when he spoke again, his whole frame shook with passion.

"Such is my revenge!" said he. "And now thy hour is come! hie thee down to darkness and perdition, thou accursed one! and shouldst thou there meet Otho the Saxon, it were needless telling him who sent thee there, full well must he remember the death-blow of Robert's dagger! and may his ghost and thine for ever haunt me, if it strike not home!"

The hapless Lady breathed a silent prayer to Heaven as Robert raised his hand. For a moment he poised the dagger at arm's length, as if to take sure and certain aim. Already was

it descending straight to the throbbing heart of the unresisting victim, when suddenly a deadly shriek, shrill and piercing, as of one in all the agonies of torture, rang through the dark corridor. Long ere its echo had died away the door was burst open, and scarcely were the murderers conscious of intrusion, when the dagger was wrenched from Red Robert's hand, and flashed, as it flew with the quickness of lightning to the further end of the chamber.

The assassin turned in dismay, and the blood recoiled from his heart as his eye fell on the swarthy countenance of the Moor himself, who, panting and breathless, stood otherwise motionless before him. Hybelin stood transfixed with terror, nor dared even to cast a look towards the apparition, for such he had deemed it; but Robert, recovering in a moment from the shock, proceeded to withdraw with trembling hand the covering from the head of his intended vic-

tim, and an exclamation of horror burst from his lips as he unveiled the pale and unconscious, though still lovely features, of the beauteous Lady Blanche.

But he did not suffer himself to be long overcome by surprise. The sound of other footsteps was heard in the corridor, and quickly perceiving his danger, he darted across the apartment to a small door, which till then had remained unobserved, calling on Hybelin to follow. But it was too late; Hybelin was now in the deadly grasp of the Wolf of La Morlaye, and he knew too well that from thence there was no escape. Robert paused not to assist his companion, for the dauntless Moor, drawing his cimeter, sprang after him with the speed of lightning.

At another time Robert would have laughed to scorn this puny enemy; now, however, he loitered not, but hastened to gain the door. He

turned upon the threshold ; the Moor was close behind—the point of his bright cimeter had twice touched him in his retreat. A confused murmur of voices was heard ; the Baron, still holding the traitor squire, was calling on his vassals to hasten their approach. In this dilemma his usual presence of mind did not forsake him ; he closed the door after him with a violent effort, and the extended weapon of the Moor snapped asunder by the concussion. Robert's fiendish laugh was heard as he fled down the secret stair beyond pursuit, while El Adhel gazed mournfully on the broken remains of the trusty blade on which he had so often relied, and heedless of the jewels with which the hilt was adorned, he cast away the remnant with a sigh, as no longer worthy to hang by his side.

During this time the Baron, who had been prevented from rendering assistance by the necessity of securing Hybelin, had called on the

Lady Blanche, by all that was dear, but she neither spoke nor moved; she lay like a beautiful statue, the heaving of her bosom alone giving token that life was not yet extinct.

And soon a crowd of vassals, led on by Raoul, came pouring into the chamber. The aged Jew had not been wholly useless; he had hastened on the first alarm to arouse the sleeping retainers, and they had rushed in a body to the rescue of their beloved master. Hybelin being quickly bound, was hurried off, amid shouts and imprecations, to the deepest dungeon of the castle; while Clodomir endeavoured, by every means that love could suggest, to restore the Lady Blanche: and he often declared in after-times, that he welcomed her return to life and consciousness with feelings of gratitude to Providence such as he had never before experienced. The painful certainty of Robert's treachery, with all the danger which

he had himself so narrowly escaped, were forgotten in the delight of that moment, and he breathed sincere vows of thanksgiving to Heaven, who had vouchsafed to spare that beloved being, without whom life itself would have been a burthen.

It was while he yet lingered on his knees beside her, gazing in rapture, as her beautiful head reclined upon his bosom, and tears of joy were stealing down her cheeks, that suddenly a clatter of horse's hoofs was heard beneath the castle-wall, and recalled him from his blissful reverie to thoughts of revenge.

The sound was already growing fainter. With flashing eye and crimsoned cheek La Morlaye started upon his feet, his sword flew from the scabbard, and he exclaimed,

"By the soul of my father! the villain shall not escape me thus! Hear ye the tramp of his charger's hoofs? By Heaven! we will after

him, and cut off his cowardly retreat. A goodly steed and a bag of gold to him who shall arrest the flight of the traitor who has so long and so cruelly abused our confidence! He fled through yonder door. Tarry not to force it—he has drawn the bolt without, and I know not where it leads. Hie round to the castle gate! if the alarm have not reached old Claude the warder, you will meet with no impediment. The drawbridge is down; and, fool that I was, in my security, it was my last command that he should let any pass this night without challenge."

"Pardon my boldness, my Lord!" said Raoul, "but now it is somewhat over late, seeing this door openeth to a secret passage, leading to a small postern hid among the brambles of the fosse on the western side of the castle. My father did oftentimes speak to me concerning this secret door, made for escape in

time of danger, but well knowing that my Lord would never need it for such purpose, I laid it not to memory, and it was but this morn, in seeking the page, when he was hurried away by the men-at-arms, that the sight of it unconsciously brought to mind the marvellous escape of the robber whom my Lord, at Sir Robert's request, once confined here."

"True, true, thou sayest well, Raoul!" exclaimed La Morlaye impatiently; "it is but another reason why we should hasten our pursuit. Let our brave varlets disperse after the flying caitiff: there are many bold of heart and swift of foot, and may yet intercept him ere he gain the forest."

"Nay, nay, it is vain," interrupted the Lady Blanche. "There would be sore cause of repentance if any were to leave the castle tonight. Thinking he spoke to the Moor, he told me how he would attack—nay, but thou

must see, he was prepared for bolder enterprise than the murder of a helpless prisoner, seeing that his steed was already saddled and waiting, plainly denoting that he was bent to the forest ere daybreak."

"Ah, I thought not of that," said Clodomir; "then be it so: we will delay our pursuit till dawn, and may my trusty brand never be sheathed until it shall have aided me to exterminate the whole miscreant band, with their leader, even though he prove to be my own cousin, the false Robert the Red. He cannot escape far; it is over dark in the forest to guide his steed in safety; but it will greatly aid us if we were to know by which path he enters. The moon is up, and it will not be hard to discern his waving plume and glittering armour from the loop-hole in the corridor."

"We cannot fail, my Lord," said Raoul,

" when there are eyes like those of the Moor doubtless both ready and willing to serve us."

" Verily, thy affection for thy master has sharpened thy wits, my worthy squire," returned the Baron. " Where is the Moor? I warrant me he could tell at a glance whither the knave is fleeing."

There was no answer. Clodomir looked anxiously around, but the scarlet turban of the page was nowhere visible. A fearful idea shot through his mind.

" Heaven defend us!" he exclaimed, in the greatest distress, " the dauntless youth is gone to seek his own destruction: alas! while we have been dallying the time in argument, he has hastened alone in pursuit of the false Knight, and with no arms save his dagger; he will surely fall a sacrifice to Red Robert's vengeance."

He pointed, as he spoke, to the broken cime-

ter, which still lay on the pavement before him.

" Let us fly to his rescue!" he continued; " suffer him not to proceed; remember, it was his timely courage which just now saved the life of your Lady!"

" And the child too!" cried the Lady Blanche; " forget not how he saved your young Lord from the grasp of a ruffian. Ha!" she continued, as the vassals were hastening towards the door, " he is not quite unarmed; his bow and quiver hung from yonder staple when we entered hither, and see, they are missing!"

" The generous youth, no doubt, flew to the court-yard as soon as he heard that the gates were open," said Clodomir; " for behold, in his haste, the nail has torn away a portion of the golden baldrick." He held up a piece of the rich brocade, and continued, " Now, has-

ten, varlets, bring him quickly back, detain him by force until I arrive, rather than suffer him to fall a victim to his ruthless enemy."

The men-at-arms rushed out on the instant, but the Jew shook his head as he saw them depart.

"Alas! it is vain," said he with a sigh, "the race of Aben-Malek are little like the laggard Christian; they shrink not from danger, neither do they loiter in revenge."

Meanwhile Clodomir bent forward through the narrow loop-hole, and gazed with beating heart into the valley. The deep fosse lay close beneath, and the passage which the Red Knight had forced through the tangled bushes was plainly visible, indicating the position of the postern-door through which he had escaped. For a while the Baron strained in vain his sight; he could discern neither steed nor horseman, and he feared that already Robert had entered the wood and was lost to observation.

"And the Moor," thought he, "had he passed the castle-gate, his white dress could not fail to be discernible in the moonlight."

He was secretly applauding his own caution in despatching the soldiers to detain him, when suddenly a distant shout, or rather yell, caused him to start. He looked earnestly in the direction whence it proceeded, and could now observe a dark mass moving in the broad shadow of an oak near to the entrance of the forest. Presently it merged into the light; the figure of Robert the Red was revealed but for a moment to the stricken gaze of Clodomir, and then was lost amid the darkness of the wood beyond.

"It is he, it is himself!" murmured the Baron; "he shouts for joy to think how well he has evaded us: and yet it seemed like a yell of pain rather than a shout of glee. But it was ever thus — his enemies have said there was something fiendish in his mirth which caused

his hours of gloom to be the most pleasant: yet I did ever love him over well to think evil of any thing he did. But now there must be an end of all my love: I must henceforth follow to the death the man for whom I would willingly have died. Oh! Robin, Robin! why hast thou leagued with my enemies? Was there any thing on earth that I would have withheld from thee?"

A tear stood in his eye as he spoke, but dashing it away, he exclaimed in the true spirit of those rude times, when revenge was a virtue and forgiveness a crime—

"Shame on my weakness! can I—ought I to look on my boy, and forget who it was that sought to take his life?"

As he said this, he turned away and proceeded to join the vassals in the court-yard. The hinds were all assembled, while the bustle and confusion of the scene, with the glare of

the numerous torches, formed a striking contrast to the solemn stillness of that which lay before him on the other side of the castle. Each individual was busily employed in preparing for the morrow's expedition to the forest; some newly stringing their trusty cross-bows of the toughest yew-tree; some in sharpening sword or dagger upon the polished stones of the pavement. Here and there a group might be seen engaged in earnest debate upon all that had taken place since sunset, while the iron-tongued alarum-bell sent forth its ominous sound from the belfry of the watch-tower, and added to the din below.

Clodomir's anxious eye sought eagerly around for the page, but he saw him not, and he impatiently inquired of Raoul whither he was gone.

"He stands down yonder alone, my Lord, under the dark archway," returned the esquire:

" he had already passed the drawbridge when we descended; but Sir Robert was even then beyond pursuit, and the Moor himself, satisfied that it was useless advancing further towards the forest, was returning to the castle."

The Baron, seizing a torch, proceeded to where the Moor was standing; he found him pale and breathless, and leaning against one of the stone pillars, apparently for support.

" El Adhel," said he, as he approached, "it was over rash in thee to set out alone in pursuit of yonder fleeing craven; it needed not that to convince us of thy dauntless courage. Fear not, we shall capture him at dawn, albeit he have now escaped to the forest."

" Say not so, my Lord," spoke El Adhel hastily; " the false Knight of the bleeding heart cannot escape, neither will he ever more seek the green forest !"

La Morlaye started at the tone of his voice; it was deep and hollow, and on drawing the

torch near to the face of the youth, he perceived traces of the most violent agitation imprinted on every feature. Every limb quivered, and the cold perspiration stood in big drops upon his forehead.

The Baron turned aside: "It is disappointed vengeance," said he to himself; "I know well that revenge is the passion dearest to a Moorish soul, but dreamed not of its existence with the gentle El Adhel."

He paced thoughtfully to and fro, and then returned to the page, and taking his hand, which trembled in his grasp, continued, "El Adhel, thou must not abide the event of to-morrow's combat; it is a struggle for life and death, and Heaven only knows the issue. It is true we have never known defeat in our encounters with the robbers, but now that my cousin Robert is at their head our fortune is like to change!"

A ghastly smile here lighted up the dark features of the Moor, and served to remind the Baron of the purport of his address.

"Thou must not depart hence," he proceeded: "at dawn an escort suitable to thy rank shall accompany thee even to the frontiers of thine own country. And hearken, El Adhel, not a word of ransom; thy generous love, thy dauntless courage, have well earned thy freedom."

The Moor was about to reply, but checking himself he continued silent, and bent his ear to listen, for a deep and hollow tread, as of an approaching horseman, echoed against the wall near which he stood.

It drew nearer: the Moor stepped forward and listened more eagerly: now it was close to the castle gate; each bound of the hoof could be heard as it fell upon the turf, and then he suddenly exclaimed in breathless haste, "By

the all-powerful God! it is Sir Robert's steed!" and sprang with the speed of lightning to the wicket.

La Morlaye himself hurried after him, with a dark presentiment of evil, as a wild and fearful shout burst from the crowd of gazers at the portal. All made way for him to advance: he paused not to inquire the cause of the tumult, but, shading his eyes with one hand, while with the other he held the torch high above his head, its light fell across the moat, and the form of a stout and gallant charger was discovered standing on the opposite brink, as if seeking for the drawbridge by which he had been accustomed to enter the castle. The white foam stood in large flakes upon his sides; he snorted and pawed the ground with impatience; and as he proudly tossed his head, the scarlet tuft by which it was adorned would ever and anon enter the ray of light, and cause

La Morlaye's heart to thrill with dismay. It was indeed the semblance of Robert's charger which stood before him; and at first all the wild legends of the forest rose to his mind, as he gazed on the well-known crest and trappings. But soon the joyous neigh of the noble animal dispelled the superstitious illusion, and with a motion of his hand he commanded the draw-bridge to be lowered on the instant.

A crowd gathered round the steed as he trotted into the court-yard, and full of dark conjectures respecting the fate of his rider, the Baron examined, with beating heart, the housings and caparisons. He appeared to have been ridden through brake and briar, for his flowing mane was torn and ragged, and the goodly bridle-rein, by which he had so often been safely guided through the mazes of the forest, was snapped asunder. The latter circumstance did not escape Clodomir.

"Robert has taken a by-path," said he, "and the steed has broken loose from the tree where he had been secured, and—" But here he paused, for even as he spoke his eye was arrested by an object of dark and direful import. It was a feather from the scarlet plume of the Knight caught in a nail of the polished steel saddle, where it hung soiled and soaked in the night dew, brushed from the long grass through which it had been dragged.

A sudden paleness overspread the Baron's features as he gazed on the ominous token; he remembered the emotion the Moor had betrayed upon mention of Red Robert's name,—the quickness with which he had recognised the tread of the steed; and now, in faint and trembling accents, he called upon his name. El Adhel obeyed the summons. He appeared to have regained composure, for his countenance was calmer than before; and when the

Baron, in mute horror, pointed to the scarlet feather, which still hung where it had at first been seen, the Moor appeared for a moment to be lost in thought, and then, drawing near, he stroked the glossy neck of the noble steed. He spoke not, but it was remarked that his glittering eye wandered with restless gaze to the different warlike accoutrements by which the object of his attention was adorned. At length, apparently unconscious of the interest he was exciting, he stooped, as if without design, to raise the bridle, which had fallen to the earth. He started as it met his touch, and holding it eagerly to the light, an exclamation burst from his lips:

"It is over," said he in a low concentrated whisper, but such was the deep silence that he was heard by all—"it is over—Allah is just! he suffers not a traitor to escape, even though his armour be sound, and his steed of the fleetest."

La Morlaye impatiently snatched the bridle from the grasp of the Moor, and he too recoiled, as the distinct impression of bloody fingers met his sight.

"Ha!" exclaimed he, in a voice scarcely audible, "it is my cousin's blood that still hangs warm and reeking from yonder bridle-rein. Speak, Saracen! for thou canst doubtless tell, what has befallen Robert the Red? whither has he fled? doth he tarry near? doth he—"

"The Knight of the Bleeding Heart is near," replied the Moor, as Clodomir paused from agitation; "were his steed swifter than the forked lightning, they travel not far who are pierced by the Moorish arrow. Would my Lord but send to the top of the hill, methinks his messengers would not have to seek long ere the false traitor be found. Let them search amid the bushes, just beyond the old oak on the outskirts of the forest!" he added,

pointing to the burs and brambles which still hung about the steed.

Every word from the lips of the Moor fell with chilling effect on the Baron's ear: a doubt of his veracity never once entered his mind; the whole became instantly evident. He had fled to the castle gate, upon the first intimation of their being open; and instead of returning, as Raoul had imagined, from a fruitless pursuit, he did not return, till an unerring shaft from his bow had wreaked vengeance on his enemy! It was even by the hand of a Saracen page that Robert the Red, the renowned warrior, whose name had once shone among the bravest of the land, had at length met his fate. He who had so often fearlessly advanced to meet death in its most terrific shapes, from the Saxon battle-axe and Moorish javelin, had found it at last in a cowardly flight, from the effects of that just

revenge which his treachery had provoked. The reflection, in spite of himself, stirred all the family pride of the Baron.

"And shall one of my father's house die the death of a dastard!" murmured he to himself. "Can I not avert this stain from the memory of one who, albeit he has offended grievously, is yet of my own kin? He must not depart thus unshriven by priest or friar, as though he had been born the lowest hind of La Morlaye. Go!" he continued, raising his voice!—"seek the spot which the Moor has pointed out, there will ye doubtless find Robert the Red: Hear ye, the Moor has wounded him sorely;—bear him hither quickly,—hasten—lose not a moment—he may already be gasping between life and death."

He remained as one in a dream after the messengers had departed, and not till the blast of the warder's horn announced their return,

did he awaken from his reverie ; and then, with beating heart and aching sight gazed towards the portal.

It opened — he advanced eagerly, and in the dim light of the torches he soon discerned the men approaching, and bearing on their shoulders a dark and motionless burthen ! He seized the arm of the Moor almost fiercely.

" Saracen !" said he, in a convulsive whisper, " if he be not yet quite gone, thinkest thou the wound may heal ?"

A dark cloud passed over the swarthy visage of the Moor at this question, but the Baron noted it not, nor even awaited a reply, for at that moment the martial cloak which enveloped the form of Robert fell, and disclosed to view his closed visor and scarlet morion.

Clodomir paused not to reflect, but forgetful of all save the love which he had once borne his cousin, he flew to his side, and called in gentle

accents on his name. The Red Knight answered not, nor returned the fond pressure with which La Morlaye had grasped his hand. The latter thrilled at the touch, it was cold as icy marble; but the arrow had not pierced the thick leather doublet which covered his breast, and there might yet be hope. Heedless of the significant glances which were exchanged between the bystanders, with trembling fingers he unclasped the helmet and unbarred the visor. His heart sickened as it was slowly raised and by degress the features of the Red Knight were exposed to view. Horror and astonishment kept him for a moment speechless, and he remained staring wildly on the lifeless form before him.

A cry of amazement burst from the surrounding group as each bent forward to discover the cause of the Baron's emotion. The countenance of Robert was black and fearfully

distorted; the fixed and glassy eyes were starting from their sockets, while the wound by which he had met his death was as yet undiscovered; and what was wonderful, no blood was visible. It was not till after the first shock had subsided, that the latter circumstance forced itself upon Clodomir's notice, and caused him at first to imagine that the arrow of the Moor had failed to strike, and that it was the fall from his horse alone, which had deprived him of life.

But he was quickly undeceived; for on removing the helmet, a Moorish arrow was discovered, lodged with almost miraculous aim in the victim's neck. The Baron seized it with violence, but, like the shafts of the Arabs, it was barbed at the point, and all his efforts to extricate it only served to force out a few drops of black and clotted gore, which trickled slowly from the wound.

"It is in vain," said he with a sigh; "the knight himself has endeavoured to withdraw it, as the blood upon his hand and upon the bridle-rein doth plainly prove. Thou art gone for ever, Robin! and, alas! would to Heaven it were not so! I may not be seen to mourn over thee!"

He raised his eyes as he spoke, and fancied with justice that he could read reproach in the countenances of the old and faithful vassals who stood beside him; and feeling how highly culpable was the expression of his grief, he commanded the body to be borne in all decent state to the Chapel of the castle, resolving to indulge his regret in solitude, unwitnessed by any.

And now already were the first streaks of golden light beginning to illumine the eastern horizon, when the Baron remembered the Moor, and the promise he had given to let him depart ere dawn. When El Adhel first appear-

ed, La Morlaye was observed to shudder and turn aside, but in another instant a benevolent smile overspread his countenance, and a sense of his injustice rose to his mind. The Moor came not alone. It was his own beloved and rescued boy who walked by his side, and whose artless expressions of endearment, as he fondly gazed upward into the face of his young deliverer, roused all the deepest feelings of gratitude in the father's bosom.

But little now remained to be accomplished. All was ready for the Moor's departure, and he proceeded to take his farewell.

With the Baron he showed but little emotion; but when he came to part from the child, his dark eye swam in tears.

"Fare thee well, thou sweet and tender blossom!" said he with a long-drawn sigh; "we must now part, and, alas! for ever! But thou wilt not lack protection, seeing that the totter-

ing step and lisping tongue are ever loved of the gracious Allah, be they Moslem or be they Christian. But in after years, when enemies press thick and hard upon thee, here is a gift will well replace El Adhel. Heir of La Morlaye, thou art a warrior's son, and wilt doubtless learn to prize it!"

Thus saying, he unslung his quiver, and drawing forth the arrows it contained, carefully selected some from the number, apparently of the same kind as the one which had pierced the neck of the Red Knight; he placed them in the hand of the boy, whose vacant stare of childish wonder contrasted finely with the expressive, intelligent glance which shot from his own speaking eye.

"See!" he again continued, "these shafts differ from the rest, inasmuch as they contain a poison, unknown to the Christian, and precious even among the children of the Prophet, so

deep and deadly, that should the least drop of blood flow from him against whom they are aimed, death will follow on the instant; and may they speed with fair success against all who would seek to do thee injury!"

The youth bent low, and gazed long and earnestly into the face of the child, as though he would impress each line of his features on his memory.

"Fare thee well, sweet Clarion, once more!" said he; "ere another moon has waned, the remembrance of the Moorish page, who loved thee so well, will fade from before thee like a dream. But fear not, thy rosy cheek and soft blue eye will never be forgotten by El Adhel."

Thus saying, he tore himself away with reluctance, and advanced to where the Lady Blanche was standing, moved to tears by the scene, and breathing many a heartfelt prayer for his safety. She held out her hand as he approached.

"Fare thee well, gentle El Adhel!" said she, "I fear not that harm will betide thee. Thou bearest with thee a mother's blessing, which was never yet invoked in vain."

The Moor fell on one knee, and drawing from his bosom a small packet, he laid it at her feet. "Then will my Lady not refuse to accept the token of a mother's gratitude," said he: "behold! it is a gift from the wife of Aben Malek, who doubted not, with all a mother's confidence, that her own El Adhel would find favour in his captor's sight."

He unbound the envelope and disclosed to view a superb carcanet of Oriental pearls of inestimable value and the most rare and costly workmanship. The Lady Blanche would have put it aside, but the Moor continued;

"Refuse it not, I pray you, my Lady; a gift returned brings with it a curse and sore dishonour to the donor; thus says the Sara-

cen, and surely my Lady would not injure him thus far."

The Lady was embarrassed; but a sign from Clodomir at once reminded her not to offend by refusing, and taking the gift in her hand, she kissed it in token of acceptance.

The Moor then arose in evident delight; he looked his thanks to the Lady Blanche, and, turning one last, fond gaze upon the child, waved his hand in token of farewell to all around. With a light bound he sprang upon his own Arab palfrey, and, followed by a safe escort, soon wound up the hill, and was lost for ever to La Morlaye.

The rest may be speedily told. So rapid and numerous had been the events of the night, that for some time after the departure of the Moor, the Baron remained as if in a dream; and it was not till near daybreak that he was aroused from his stupor, by the arrival of De

Loménie, who returned with the escort to the Castle. The surprise and indignation of the latter, upon hearing all that had passed, may be better imagined than described. In the tempest of his wrath, he would have wreaked his vengeance upon the person of the Red Knight, by causing him to be hung by the neck as the meanest felon. But the Baron firmly refused to hearken to such a proposal.

"No," said he, "he has been spared this dishonour; his golden spurs were on his heels when he met his untimely death; and the person of a knight is ever sacred, even though he may be guilty. It is to the traitor Hybelin that we will turn our thoughts of vengeance, and ere another sun sets upon La Morlaye, shall he reap the reward due to his treachery."

This was accordingly done. Hybelin was executed on the morrow; the ruby, which had

served the Red Knight in his attempt to ruin the Moor, was found concealed in his doublet; and it was some consolation to La Morlaye to know, that, ere he died, he acknowledged that it was himself who had first misled the Knight and induced him to join the robbers.

Even after the total dispersion of the band, and the taking of the blood-red scarf which had served as their banner, when Robert's memory was execrated by all, did Clodomir alone, recalling Hybelin's avowal, yet endeavour to palliate his guilt. "He was more weak than criminal," he would often say; "forget not he was once the soul of honour, and had he not hearkened to evil counsel, his name, instead of being remembered with curses, would still shine, glorious and unsullied, in the bright annals of our house."

It was long ere the memory of these events had passed away among the simple inhabitants

of the forest. Beside the social hearth in winter, beneath the cottage porch in summer, for many generations, did the history of the gallant and graceful Moor, with his brave deliverance of his master's heir, the miraculous escape of the Lady Blanche, and the dark treachery of the caitiff Knight, become the standing tale of interest; and, in after years, amid the numerous battles which followed the death of Charlemagne, and the division of the empire, when the dauntless bravery of the young Sir Clarion de la Morlaye had filled all Europe with his renown, it was secretly whispered that more than once, being hard pressed, he owed the preservation of his life to the arrows of the generous Moorish captive.

Of the other gift no record is left, save that the ladies of the noble house of La Morlaye were long celebrated — as maidens, for their matchless beauty; as matrons, for their hap-

piness in the wedded state; and this latter circumstance having been remarkable, even in those days of primitive simplicity, was considered, says a credulous old chronicler, "to be owing to the preservation in the family of a rich carcanet of Oriental pearls, which being wrought with a powerful Moorish spell, and worn by each maiden on her bridal-day, possessed the virtue of for ever fixing the heart of him on whom she had bestowed her own."

ASH-WEDNESDAY.

ASH-WEDNESDAY.

CHAPTER I

" Je n'ose rien entreprendre sans y avoir bien pensé ; mais quand une fois j'ai pris ma résolution, je vais à mon but, je renverse tout, je fauche tout, et ensuite je couvre tout de ma soutane rouge !"

PROPRES PAROLES DU CARDINALDE RICHELIEU AU MARQUIS DE VIEUVILLE.

How little do the mere children of the world think of that calm and quiet happiness which is inseparable from the monastic life. They deem it a life of mere indolence and ease, ignorant of the privations which all must suffer

whose days are devoted to their God within the sacred privacy of the cloister. They seem to think that no sentiment, save piety, should have place within the bosom of the monk, and know not that every great and noble quality will often there find a home: generosity, and sweet forgiveness, and truth, and faith, and honour, ay, even bravery is not wanting; for in the good and righteous cause the heart will beat with as warm and quick a pulse beneath the holy soutane, as beneath the laced doublet or embroidered pourpoint.

Such were the reflections of the young novice of Saint Firmin, Isidore de Mireville, as at the silent hour of midnight he ascended from the convent chapel to seek his humble couch in the rude cell allotted to his use. The holy period of Lent was drawing nigh, and at that season Saint Firmin was always a place of some importance, containing the nearest convent to

Chantilly; and, whenever the King was staying at the Palace, he usually passed the day of fast and penance, Ash-Wednesday, in holy *retraite* at this convent. Louis XIII. who, perhaps, of all monarchs, was the greatest observer of rules and established customs, would have considered it a crime to have disregarded this venerable usage. He had already announced to the Prior his intention of rendering the accustomed visit, and this intimation had filled the whole community with joy; the Holy Brotherhood were delighted with the pomp, the ceremony, and the importance conferred upon each individual of the establishment. It was only for a day, but the long time spent in preparations enlivened the year, and made it seem to pass away more quickly; for Saint Firmin is a small village in the very heart of the forest, which even now, but for the casual straggler from Chantilly, would never be visited by

strangers. How glad, too, was the Prior when his convent was honoured with the royal presence; it gave him fresh consequence, and enabled him to assume greater authority for the whole twelve months succeeding.

At the time when this narrative commences, the good Father Eugène de Rochat was Prior. He had every reason to rejoice at the prospect of the royal visit which had gladdened the hearts of his predecessors; but there was one reason above all, to him of deep and paramount importance, that particularly enhanced this prospect now. It was a secret hope, nay, almost a sweet conviction, that the day was destined to be one of success to his nephew, the blooming novice of Saint Firmin, Isidore de Mireville. He felt assured that the King would notice the youth, that his Majesty would be attracted by his gentle innocence, his modest piety, and above all by the surpassing beauty which he knew

could not fail to draw attention, and which, among the aged and infirm brothers, seemed that of an angel among mortals.

Isidore de Mireville was an orphan, and, like many at that period, had seen all his prospects of worldly advancement for ever sacrificed to the necessity of maintaining family honours in which he was never destined to participate, and of supporting family pride of which he was expected to possess no share.

But Isidore cared not; he knew no sorrow: his elder brother revelled in all the wealth and luxury which high fortune and high birth could bestow, while he was doomed to pass his days in retirement. But still he cared not, for Providence had cast his lot among those to whom his presence was a blessing, and he knew no wish beyond. His uncle, the good Prior of Saint Firmin, loved him beyond any thing else upon earth; but with the holy brothers of the

convent small was the merit of such a feeling, for who loved not Isidore de Mireville? Even the villagers of Saint Firmin could always tell when it was his turn to assist the Prior at the altar, by the unusually gay appearance of the chapel, and the sudden despoiling of their own little gardens. They would rally the pretty dark-eyed peasant girls upon their sudden anxiety to adorn the chapel, and their pious preference for the *bel Abbé*, as they already began familiarly to designate the Prior's handsome nephew. But the latter took no heed of their sly attentions,—they disturbed not his repose; his mind was already filled with honourable ambition, and the only maiden upon whom he bestowed a thought was his own sister, the sweet, the gentle Aline. For her, indeed, he would often sigh with heartfelt grief. He sorrowed for her fate,—he trembled to think of the rashness which had consigned her, so young,

so beautiful, so well calculated to adorn the world, to the dismal walls of a nunnery. He grieved not for himself; he had been bred in retirement, and could rise by perseverance and exertion to dignities and honours; but, alas! for Aline, who had been brought up in the splendour and gaiety of a court, to be thus suddenly torn from the world and its enjoyments, without a dream or hope of change! the reflection caused him many a bitter pang, and made him often pause amid his own dreams of greatness to pity her, or to breathe a prayer for her happiness.

On the night to which the reader's attention has been already directed, the Novice had prolonged his vigils at the shrine of his patron saint far beyond the usual hour. The approaching visit of the King to Saint Firmin had filled him with dreamy speculations, almost as wild, it must be confessed, as those of his

loving uncle. The sudden rise of the Bishop of Luçon to the cardinalate, his rapid elevation to the highest dignities of the state, his present glory and boundless power, had served to encourage these sanguine hopes; for Isidore was young and innocent, he knew but little of the world, and still less of the intrigues of a court. He deemed the astonishing success of Richelieu to be entirely owing to his own virtue and merit: he had viewed his course in guileless admiration, and knew not that the Cardinal had already sacrificed the love of all good men,—that he had already bartered for the sake of worldly grandeur, all his peace of mind here, and his hopes of happiness hereafter.

But Isidore scarcely imagined that such things were: he lay down to rest and sank to sleep, his mind still filled with those bright visions in which he so fondly loved to indulge. Soon did the dreams of worthy ambi-

tion which nightly visited his pillow begin once more to dance before his fancy. The fair and flowing ringlets of the Novice changed to the shaven crown and dark cowl of the monk; the cowl was converted into the mitre of the bishop; these vanished, and the scarlet hat, the *rochet* and the *camail* next appeared before him; when these were gone, they left the triple crown of glorious import, and on this his imagination seemed to dwell with glowing fondness. He was seated in the papal chair, clothed in the pontiff purple, surrounded by his quaintly-attired guard, and a whole nation bowing at his feet. The keys of massive gold were in his grasp; that signet-ring which no price can pay adorned his uplifted hand; the glare of light, the incense and the perfume, the heat, the crowd, dazzled and bewildered him; and—alas that it should have been a dream!—he suddenly awoke, but unclosed not

his eyes, endeavouring to recall the sweet illusion. He did not deem it entirely banished, for a deep voice whispered softly in his ear—

" Isidore de Mireville, thy fortune is in thy own hands !"

The words seemed suddenly to check the respiration of the youth; they seemed almost like the warning of some unearthly visitant, the punishment of his presumption, of his ambitious dreams; but they were again repeated still in a low soft whisper—

" Isidore de Mireville, thy fortune is in thy own hands !"

He thought at first that he laboured under some delusion; he breathed a short prayer to aid in dispelling it, and opened his eyes, but soon found all his doubts and fears entirely groundless: it was his uncle, whose joyous rubicund countenance now bent over his own

in fond solicitude, and who now again repeated—

"Isidore, arise, thy fortune is made; thou art already in the fair way to become a bishop. Array thyself quickly and in silence, and follow me."

Isidore could not help smiling at his own alarm as he gazed on the jovial face and portly figure of the Prior; but the father seemed eager to check any expression of astonishment on the part of his nephew, for he busily assisted in his hurried toilet, and led him from the chamber before the eyes of the Novice were well open.

They walked in silence and on tiptoe side by side along the corridor; the Prior started as the nasal tokens of profound slumber met his ear from the cells where the weary monks reposed, but they proceeded, however, without molestation, nor stopped till they reached

the door of the Prior's own study. Here the good priest paused and looked at Isidore. The youth might, perhaps, for a time have felt a slight misgiving at this untimely summons, but a single glance was, however, sufficient to banish all fear: the countenance of the Prior was full of joy; his small grey eyes sparkled with delight, and he chuckled somewhat audibly as he whispered—

"Isidore, thou knowest not the good fortune that has befallen thee: be in no wise daunted, the stranger within will——But hark! I must not tarry; he is hot and impatient: hearest thou his heavy paces? he is already weary with waiting."

The Father held the lantern which had guided their steps to the features of Isidore; he smiled as he parted the rich clusters of chestnut ringlets which the scissors had as yet

left to their natural luxuriance, to see the marble whiteness of the forehead beneath. He smoothed down the modest *soutane* into more graceful folds, and turned the *petit collet* with its snow-white ends more smartly over his bosom: he would, perhaps, have proceeded to a complete re-arrangement of the youth's toilet, had not a short irritable cough and a slight stamping of the foot from within announced that the stranger's patience was fast deserting him.

"Hearest thou?" exclaimed the Prior; "he is already fretting with impatience, although I said I should not like to alarm thee by waking thee too suddenly. I could swear by the Pix we have not been more than—"

Another stamping of the foot, accompanied by an angry exclamation, here interrupted the Prior's speech, or he might perhaps have continued till morning, for he was one of those who deem talking and saying as much upon

a subject as possible, the greatest of earthly blessings. In this instance, however, he appeared to think it prudent to forego for once his favourite indulgence, for he ceased speaking, opened the door with a hurried hand, and entered, leading in Isidore.

The latter trembled, he scarcely knew why, when he stood face to face with the stranger, who was already seated, and in the Prior's own chair too, the large *bergère*, which was considered almost as sacred as the "Fatal chair which was cased with cloth of golde." It needed no greater proof to convince the Novice that the visitor was of the highest importance, for few would have dared thus to usurp the place of honour. The apartment appeared cold and comfortless. The stranger sat before the wide-mouthed chimney, which contained, alas! nothing but a heap of smouldering embers, for the Prior himself ever loved to sit out the bright

and cheerful blaze, and he had retired to rest some hours before this unseasonable intruder had disturbed his repose. The single lamp upon the table shed but a dim and sickly light through the chamber, and Isidore could not at first discern the stranger's features. He loitered behind through embarrassment and timidity, even after his uncle had advanced to where his visitor was seated. The silence was broken by the reverend Prior himself.

This is the youth of whom I was just now speaking to your Emi——."

" Let him advance," interrupted the stranger in a stern voice, and turning a hasty glance to where Isidore was standing, he added haughtily, " Is there cause of fear, Sir Novice, that you linger thus?"

The tone was sharp and austere, and little likely to quell the timidity of the youth; and the Prior, who seemed in the greatest dread of

provoking the stranger's anger, officiously took his nephew by the hand and led him to the table.

"Draw near, young man," again said the stranger with more mildness, yet still in a commanding tone.

Isidore did as he was ordered, when with a sudden movement the stranger raised the lamp, so that its light fell wholly on his features, and at the same time fixed upon them a keen, scrutinizing glance. Isidore bore it without flinching. He started at the sudden blaze of light, and the colour deepened on his cheek, but his eye quailed not; it was rather raised with a strong expression of curiosity upon the stranger's countenance. He could not check a slight exclamation of surprise upon finding that he who had thus silenced the Prior with irreverent impatience, was a young man, in the very flower of his youth, pale and delicate in

feature and slight in stature, without any external sign to indicate why he had thus assumed that tone of authority, or why his uncle had thus tamely submitted to bear with it. His attire was splendid, that of a courtier; and yet it seemed inappropriate, for he was evidently wanting in the ease and elegant deportment of a gentleman. The broad Spanish hat of the cavalier was duly adorned with plumes and jewels, and, moreover, placed with all due attention to courtly grace upon his brow; but it seemed, notwithstanding, to accord but ill with the smooth chin and closely-shaven lip of the wearer, at a time when the pointed beard and curled mustachio were deemed indispensable to the appearance of every person of distinction. The large military cloak of dark cloth in which he was enveloped completely hid his dress from observation, but the long rapier at his side seemed to embarrass and annoy him

as it awkwardly projected at right-angles across his knee, and through the elbow of his chair. He wore riding-boots, and long spurs upon his heels; but he sat with his feet apart, lest they should get entangled in his cloak, and Isidore could not but persuade himself that he was unused to wear them. His features, as we have already observed, were thin and pale. Nothing could there be traced to account for the air of conscious superiority with which he had addressed the Prior of Saint Firmin. But his eye alone spoke volumes: it now rested with satisfaction upon the mild ingenuous countenance of Isidore, and yet the youth shrank even from that gaze,—it made him tremble.

"And this is your nephew, holy Prior?" said he at length, while his eye glanced from one to the other as though he doubted the holy father's veracity.

"Ay, indeed, he is, your Emi—hem, Sir!

your Grace I would say; and I fear not he will do your gracious bidding to your heart's content. He is as good a youth as ever breathed a prayer to the Virgin. Would you believe it, your Emi—your Grace I would say, he knows the whole of Saint Thomas Aquinas; has made notes on the Imitation;—I will fetch them, that your Grace may judge. Verily the youth is wellnigh fit to be a Bishop. He would not disgrace the crook and mitre; but, alas! fortune is every thing. Other people, with not half the talent, have risen to be Cardinals, and—"

"Well, it is well, good Father; but—"

"Nay, but listen, your Grace: verily he is a most sweet and proper youth, the pet and pride of the whole brotherhood; and is he not fair, your Grace? Will he not look comely in the scarlet hat? His mother was my own sister; and if it be true that some have gained

advancement merely from possessing comely looks—"

"We are losing time, good Prior," interrupted the stranger, coldly.

But the worthy Father had the subject too much at heart to let it drop so easily. It was one upon which he always grew exceedingly loquacious, fancying, with the fond error of affection, that all were as deeply interested in it as himself, and, nothing daunted, he continued:—

"Yes, your Grace, the youth is thought to be well enough for comeliness, and—"

"True, true, I perceive it," again interrupted the visitor, tapping the sole of his boot against the stone hearth in evident impatience.

"Yes, your Grace, all can perceive that; but his better qualities are hid. Now his mother was my sister, and—"

"Enough, enough, Sir Prior! we would wish—"

"Now his mother was my sister. I say it not as a proof of his quick wit and cleverness, but simply because the assertion coming from my lips, your Grace, is a guarantee of its truth, seeing that I must know him well, and would not for the world tell a falsehood concerning him."

"Your logic is excellent, worthy Prior; but leave us for a moment: your presence here—"

"I would simply observe that—"

"Depart, and leave us!" exclaimed the stranger, unable longer to control his irritation, while his eye began to kindle rather ominously.

"But your Grace—"

"Leave us, or I depart hence to seek assistance elsewhere."

This threat had the desired effect. The

Prior saw the golden prize slipping from his nephew's grasp; he needed no more bidding, but suddenly disappeared, leaving Isidore alone with the stranger. The latter spoke not for a few moments; he was evidently waiting to hear the receding steps of the holy father. The welcome sound soon fell upon his ear, and then he slowly bent forward in his chair, and taking the Novice by the hand, drew him into the light. He again gazed long and earnestly upon his countenance, while his dark and piercing eye seemed endeavouring to read his inmost soul.

"Have you faith and courage, young man?" he said at length, in a deep and anxious tone.

The Novice did not answer; he bent his head meekly upon his bosom, and bowed with humility.

"They tell me you are sanguine and am-

bitious, and that you hope to rise in the Church ?"

The smile which suddenly illumined the face of the Novice, and the deep crimson which as suddenly tinged his cheek, were apparently sufficient for the stranger, as he pressed not for a reply, but continued.

" You must not, however, think to rise without exertion. Listen to what I now propose. Time presses, and I must be brief. You will do me the small service which I now require, and the reward will far surpass your most sanguine expectations. I have at my command honours and distinctions, and by my help may you one day aspire to high renown, that shall not pass away."

The large hazel eyes of the Novice seemed to expand, as they were riveted on the speaker, with mingled surprise and delight. His lips were slightly parted as he listened in mute at-

tention, and he scarcely drew his breath, while his ears drank in those sweet delusive sounds.

The stranger perceived his advantage with the same dark joy which the crocodile may be supposed to feel when he beholds the timid antelope draw near to the river's brink to slake his thirst in its transparent waters.

"The service which I ask of you," he proceeded, "is small indeed; nay, with greater truth it might be termed a service rendered to our Mother Church, since you are merely to be the instrument of Heaven in inflicting its punishment upon an odious offender. See you! here is gold! it is your's already if you will do what I require." He drew forth a well-stored purse, and as he placed it on the table, resumed, without raising his eyes to Isidore—"Have you ever heard of the young Marquis de Croix?"

"Ay, verily, all have heard of him;—

he endowed the chapter of White Friars near."

"Tush; tell me not of that; his hypocrisy only aggravates his guilt. He has given mortal offence to the King, who exiled him to his own estate at Croix. And while in his solitude, what think you he has done? Stolen a Novice from her convent, and married her in the very face of ghostly counsel."

The voice of the stranger manifestly trembled with rage; but a lurid smile passed over his features at the expression of innocent horror which was visible in the countenance of Isidore.

"Now, listen," he continued; "it is not meet such offence should go unpunished. We of the—psha!—you of the Church should see due justice administered. But the King will not understand this; he is soft and tender-hearted, and does not see the necessity of timely

severity. He has ever been over partial to this young Marquis; he is already weary of his anger, and longs to see him once more at court. He has written to invite him hither on Ash-Wednesday, to meet the other courtiers, and do the accustomed penance, and he looks forward to restoring him to favour and forgiveness." He pressed his clenched fist with energy upon the table, and once more looked steadfastly at Isidore as he added,—

"Such is the *King's* determination; but look you, *I* have sworn that the Marquis shall not come!"

Isidore was somewhat startled; the stranger, however, gave him no time for astonishment, for he drew from beneath his cloak a large brass key, which he held up to the light, and appeared to examine with attention, while he proceeded hastily,—

"There is a dungeon beneath the convent

chapel, and it is thither the Marquis must be conveyed until the King has taken his departure. Do you not see that his Majesty will be more incensed than ever?—ay, in truth will he; and it is not unlikely that such apparent neglect of his royal commands will be the cause of entire disgrace to the silver-tongued coxcomb!"

The courage of the Novice began to fail him; he could not reconcile it with his conscience thus to act in opposition to the wishes of his sovereign, and he murmured some half audible excuses. But the stranger pretended not to hear them, or rather they were completely drowned in the loud authoritative tone in which he resumed:

"Your uncle, the Prior of Saint Firmin, will tell you all the particulars concerning this dungeon. You are fortunate, young man:—the service might have been one of danger and

difficulty,—nay, you might even have had to risk life itself in the adventure; but see, the path is clear before you. At sunset to-morrow you will hie to the dark woodland hollow that lies eastward of the palace at Chantilly,—you doubtless know it well; it is called the *sombre repaire:* you will there meet a party of armed men bound over to my service; they will be well provided with all things necessary for securing the criminal: you will guide them hither in silence and secrecy—for mark you, I love not that those who serve me should communicate one with the other,—and those men know nothing of the business on which they are engaged; you will find them, nevertheless, ready to do any thing you may require of them: they will convey your prisoner to the dungeon,—here is the key; to you, young man, I confide it."

He placed the huge key into the trembling

hand of the Novice. The latter had been confused by the quick and sudden orders of the cavalier, and, dismayed by their dark mysterious design, he dared not even think of the difficulty of the enterprise, for that cold stern gaze was still fixed upon him and awed him into silence. His own looks were downcast, and he turned aside as he faltered out with evident trepidation :—" But will the Marquis know—"

" Ha ! say no more ; did I not tell you that you were fortunate ? I might have left you to bear all the toil of this adventure, but I have already rendered you some assistance—Enough, young man, the Marquis will be there, because —ha ! ha ! ha !—because he is the very soul of honour."

He laughed with apparent mirth, and the sound grated harshly on the ear of Isidore. He could have sighed in bitterness to discover

the nature of the service to which the Prior had seemingly bound him. He thought of refusing, but still that piercing eye seemed ever ready to gaze him into stone, and each time its glance met his, his resolution failed him. The stranger profited by this indecision, for he suddenly rose.

"And now, Novice of Saint Firmin, you have your orders; it is not my wont to make them even thus explicit, but you are young, and I see there are prejudices to overcome in you. All have them in youth; I had them too, but in the world they faded soon."

His voice had softened while he spoke, and he advanced a few steps towards the door, when he turned abruptly, and suddenly exclaimed with as much haughtiness as before.

"It is wise to make doubly secure; none can be trusted; it is not the mere look of innocence

that constitutes honesty. List you once more, Sir Novice: you will see me with the King on Ash-Wednesday; marvel not in whatsoever guise you may behold me; remember that in the world men do bold deeds and have engrossing schemes, of which, in your peaceful convent, you can as yet know nothing. Yonder key must be surrendered to me that I may know our prisoner is safe: there is a *tourniquet* through which you will pass his food,—you—and you alone, are to tend him, and no one besides is even to know of his existence. You will seek your opportunity to speak to me in private; fear not, it is worth a trial of your wits."

He laid his hand emphatically upon the youth's shoulder as he proceeded.

"The recompense will be princely, more worthy of your employer, than of the service, for that is small indeed. I am one who can

well assist your ambitious hopes, and faith and silence are all I ask in return. Few have had so clear a way to fortune prepared for them as that which now lies before you. Farewell! be firm—be steady, and your dreams of worldly advancement will soon be realised."

Thus saying he once more turned towards the door, nor gave the Novice time to reply, but beckoned him to follow. Isidore scarcely knew why he was thus obedient even to the very gestures of this haughty stranger; he stayed not to question the motive which thus impelled him, but, taking the lantern which the Prior had left on the outside of the chamber, hastened onward. They wound through the low-arched passages and round the cloistered court-yard; the stranger did not speak, nor even turn to look at his youthful companion. The neighing of a steed in the distance caused him to quicken his steps; and apparently well

acquainted with the way, he crossed the quadrangle towards the low wicket which opened into the convent garden. He needed no guidance, but entered at once, uttering an angry exclamation as the steed was again heard to neigh louder than before; Isidore followed in silence through the smooth gravel-walks, and over the soft grass-plots. Here the lantern was not needed, for the moon shone so bright in the heavens as to render its flickering light wholly useless. It was March, the night was clear, but the wind blew with violence; and now and then a fitful gust would bend the light shrubs which skirted the flower-beds almost to the very ground.

The garden was extensive, one entrance opening towards the village, the other towards the forest; and the heart of Isidore de Mireville beat with more than its usual quickness, and he shivered from other causes than the cold, when

the stranger walked towards the long dark avenue which led to the latter. The light was now once more found of service, for the tall chestnuts, the growth of many generations, although clothed as yet merely in their light spring foliage, were in many places so thick as to exclude the moonbeams. The stranger moved onward still in silence, seeming like some mysterious spirit; his tall form enveloped from head to foot in a dark flowing mantle; the long white plumes of his hat, moved by each gust of wind, wildly tossing to and fro amid the darkness, or the string of jewels which looped the front of the broad beaver, fiercely flashing as they caught the moon's ray through the restless branches. The wind howled mournfully as each gust swept through the old avenue, and seemed to mingle with the loud unbroken roar which was borne from the forest.

At length they reached the gate, the key was

in the lock, the stranger opened it and stepped out. Two steeds were tied beneath a tree close to the entrance, and Isidore advanced to assist the stranger in mounting. The latter looked right and left, then called aloud,

"Ho, there, Desnoyers, where art thou?" A man suddenly started from the shadow of the wall as though just aroused from slumber. He stammered out some excuses, to which the stranger apparently deigned no reply, and hurriedly loosening the bridle of one of the steeds, led him to the gate.

The attendant stood at the bridle-rein while the stranger mounted, and Isidore courteously advanced to hold the stirrup. The cavalier bent low when he was seated in the saddle, and whispered in the ear of the Novice,

"Young man, beware! I have told you but of the recompense, because I deemed success as certain. I would now add another word: be-

tray the trust I have reposed in you, breathe but one word of the service on which you are engaged, or flinch from performing it, and by the most holy mass, you will live to think of the Marquis de Croix in his solitary dungeon with a feeling of envy !"

As he finished speaking, he snatched the lantern which Isidore was holding from his hand, and held it to his face.

" Desnoyers, come hither ! look well on this youth, and tell me if thou shouldst recognise him elsewhere."

" Ay, marry, that I would easily," returned the attendant, who by this time had also mounted his steed and trotted to the side of his master; " he is a comely youth, it is a pity he should be doomed to wear yonder frock of frieze and corded belt, the doublet and mantle would better —"

" Silence, fool !" exclaimed the stranger in a

voice of thunder, as he suddenly turned in absolute fury towards the abashed and terrified speaker, and then again stooping low, he would once more have spoken to Isidore, but just then a tremendous gust of wind swept by, and the hat with its waving plumes rolled beneath his horse's feet. Isidore stooped to pick it up, when the stranger snatched it from his hand, and replacing it hastily upon his head, exclaimed hurriedly, as the chimes from the convent chapel broke upon his ear, "Hark you, it is already three o'clock; I shall be missed if I do not make all haste homeward before dawn. But stay, I had forgotten; your name, young man; say quickly, what is your name?"

"Isidore de Mireville!" returned Isidore, almost breathless with agitation.

"Ha! what say you?"

"Isidore de Mireville!"

The stranger gazed at the youth for an

instant, as if uncertain that he had heard aright.

" Nay, nay, but this is too good !" he exclaimed. " By the mass, it could not have been better ordered !—Farewell ! farewell !—Isidore de Mireville ! ha ! ha ! ha !"

He now put spurs to his horse and galloped off, that wild peal of laughter echoing back upon the ear of the Novice, and filling him with horror and alarm.

He stood motionless where they had left him, long after that sound had died away. He fancied that he had indeed been holding converse with some spirit of darkness. He hurried homeward in dismay ; nor did he regain his composure even when he found himself once more in his own cell, with the moonbeams struggling faintly through the little casement ; for when the plumed beaver of that proud cavalier had fallen to the ground, he had

beheld the scanty locks and tonsored crown of one whose vows were of lowliness and truth, and who had sworn at the altar to renounce the world, and to devote his life to the service of his God.

CHAPTER II.

THE following day was one of absolute misery to Isidore de Mireville, and the first of misery which he had ever known. It was Shrove-Tuesday, and a day of strict retirement to the monks, who were not permitted to go abroad among the masking and revelry then so universally indulged in on that festival, which immediately preceded the period of quadragesimal humiliation, but were compelled to remain within their convent to pray for the souls of those who were then engaged in all kinds of riot and dissipation. When, however, prayer

grew tedious, the altered looks and dejected air of their favourite, the Novice Isidore, formed a most providential source of argument and controversy, as they all sat at the hour of noon beneath the cloisters of the quadrangle. Contention ran high, for every one was interested in the debate: brother Placide vowing that the youth studied too hard, and gave himself too much uneasiness; brother Justin declaring that such could not be the fact, as the Novice had not remained quiet for a single moment during the day, and that even then he was walking in haste and agitation to and fro in the chestnut avenue. Father Sévérin advised stricter discipline and longer prayers, but was opposed by Father Clément, who gave as his opinion, that the dear boy should be left entirely to the direction of his own good will.

Meanwhile the object of their kindly solicitude, as brother Justin had truly observed, was

pacing the chestnut avenue, where he had parted with the stranger on the night preceding. He had already sought the Prior, to gain the information concerning the dungeon which the stranger had told him the holy man was well enabled to give. In his perplexity he had at first imagined that he should find this assertion false—that it was perhaps intended as another snare on the part of that mysterious personage, for he could not deem it possible that his kind uncle would have thus bound him over to the service of one who was evidently engaged in deeds of darkness. He was, however, surprised —nay, shocked, at the readiness with which the Prior led him at once to the dungeon, showing him, with the most careful precision, all the secret passages, and leading him, as he himself observed, for practice, through the dark entrance, and up the narrow stair which led into the garden, whither he was to conduct the

party of armed men bearing with them the unhappy Marquis. The old Prior could not even disguise his inward delight, but all the while kept addressing divers ejaculations and benedictions to every Saint in the calendar for having thus aided his dear Isidore in securing such a patron; and when the Novice ventured to express a doubt that the stranger really did possess the power to do all that he had professed, the worthy Father laughed outright, and exclaimed, "Ah! thou knowest not;—would that I could disclose to thee!—but thou art in truth most fortunate. He asked for one who was young and ambitious—it was almost naming thee; but—but, alas! get thee gone, boy, or I shall tell thee all."

With these words he left him, as if he dared not trust himself to converse further, lest he should disclose the secret.

This observation, as may be supposed, in-

creased rather than diminished the anxiety of the Novice, and made him think of the adventure with yet more fear than before. He thought the day interminable, although he dreaded its close: he walked twice to the entrance of the *sombre repaire*, as though he possessed not confidence in his memory, and feared to mistake the path.

But the sun did at last sink in the west, and the daylight at length began to fade, and then the Novice Isidore stole out through the garden-gate into the forest. His heart throbbed wildly as he advanced further into its dark recesses; it was the first adventure in which he had ever been engaged, and at that moment all his long-cherished visions of greatness and distinction were forgotten; he felt, indeed, as if nothing could ever repay him for that long day of suffering and self-reproach. The sounds of mirth and revelry — the joyous shout — the

noisy laughter—the soft music of the flute, and the hum of the tabor, broke upon the stillness from the village; and as he turned to take a last look up the open space before he entered the dark and solitary path which led to the *sombre repaire*, he perceived that the heavens were all tinted red with the *feux-de-joie* and illuminations lighted by the peasants in honour of the day, and that last look served to make the darkness to which he was hastening appear yet more awful and forbidding. He trembled as he drew near to the spot appointed; it was one of the gloomy and desolate hollows with which this part of the forest abounds, situated between two lofty hills covered with hanging wood, through which the path wound narrow and intricate. Even as he stood upon the brow of the hill, he paused, overcome by one last longing wish to return; but, as he stood thus, so deep was the stillness that he could hear the low

subdued murmur of men's voices from below, and, hushing his fears, he again proceeded. He knew that these were the ruffians whom his mysterious employer had engaged in this unworthy service, and he shuddered but to think with whom he was thus leagued to do evil. They were apparently awaiting his arrival, for at his approach they started up from beneath the tree where they had been seated, and advanced to meet him, the empty flasks which remained upon the ground plainly bespeaking what had been their previous occupation. Isidore was panting and breathless, and doubly confused at thus finding himself suddenly surrounded by this band of desperadoes; for a moment he could not speak, but gazed around, with mingled curiosity and fear, as the light of their lanterns reflected upon the bronzed and hardened features of each of his companions. They, too, were evidently surprised at the

youthful and innocent appearance of the Novice, for they stared and drew closer round him as his features became fully revealed in the light, and Isidore felt a burning blush mantle upon his cheek, as he heard the one whisper to the other,

"How young he is! — it is a wonder he is entrusted with a mission of this importance!"

"Ay, ay," rejoined his companion, "young enough in years, but old enough in guilt, I 'll warrant me, or he would not have been deemed worthy of such confidence."

The youth gave his directions as briefly as possible, for his heart sickened at the thought of long companionship with these lawless ruffians; they, however, seemed instructed to heed his orders, for they listened respectfully, and when he had concluded, officiously displayed, with a kind of horrible pleasure, the

implements with which they were provided to aid in securing the prisoner; the closed litter to bear him through the wood in silence and secrecy, and the strong cords to bind him in case of resistance; but they did not tell why they were so well armed, and Isidore dared not ask them.

He was rejoiced beyond measure when they all withdrew behind the trees to await in concealment the appearance of their victim. He who seemed the foremost of the band remained without to keep watch, and the monotonous tramp of his heavy boot, as he paced to and fro, filled the Novice with dismay from the bare apprehension of hearing it cease. It appeared as if hours had already passed since he had left the convent; he fancied it almost midnight, for the pitchy darkness aided the delusion; and as the time waned away, the thought of his own danger, should the Marquis not come after all,

almost overcame the horror with which the idea even of success in the adventure had at first inspired him. He heard the coarse jest and the rude unseemly oath at this long delay, pass in a whisper among his companions; every breath of wind that moved the boughs above his head startled him with the thought that the Marquis was approaching, and yet, when the sentinel did at length come behind him and lay his hand upon his arm, he almost sprang away with affright.

"He approaches," said the man as he softly crept behind the bushes, "take heed lest he hear us even breathe; I will whistle to give the signal for seizing him."

He said no more, but, had he proceeded further, Isidore would not have listened, for his whole soul seemed now to hang upon the footsteps of that young Cavalier.

They drew near and paused; the beating of

his heart almost ceased from the anxiety of that moment. The next, those footsteps were close at his side; he could even hear the hard and laboured breathing of their intended victim as he advanced to where the eager hirelings were awaiting him. His mantle caught the very boughs behind which Isidore was concealed, and they still remained trembling even when he had passed by; it seemed as though the Marquis had come prepared for danger, as he advanced with caution, and stopped each moment as if to listen. Isidore felt the blood rush in a torrent to his face, and he gasped for breath as he heard the bravo, who stood by his side, draw the leathern belt which bound his waist tighter through his broad buckle, and fasten the strings of his cloak previous to darting forth from his ambush; he heard the ominous click as the ruffian cocked his blunderbuss; another moment, and a faint scream

escaped his lips, for the loud shrill whistle rang through the wood, and Isidore was conscious that he stood alone. He heard the scuffling of feet upon the turf, and the faint struggle of the prisoner; but not a word was spoken on either side, and for an instant all was as still as death. Presently, however, there was a whispering again among them.

"Where is the Abbé?" said one.

"Oh! behind the bushes, praying for our safety and success!"

A hearty, though subdued laugh, followed this speech, and another exclaimed,

"We must now look after him, for we know not even so much as where to carry our burthen. I marvel much who it is that we have now so safe in the litter. How cleverly we gagged him with his own mantle! I warrant me he can tell no tales. Ha! ha! ha! with his own mantle! One would think it had been made on

purpose! But hist! here comes the Abbé at last. His prayers are doubtless ended, now that he himself is out of danger!"

He stooped to aid in raising the litter as Isidore appeared. He seemed unable to control his astonishment, for he suddenly exclaimed,

"Marry, he is not over weighty; why, in truth, he cannot be of more substance than the little Jesuit,—dost remember it, Sauvan?—whom we had to bear down the dungeon steps of the Bastille to the *oubliette*."

"True!" replied Sauvan; "and like that luckless wight, lies just as still and motionless, though he cannot as yet have the same reason; for if my memory serves me well, yonder Jesuit had been fed on bread and water for many weeks, and twice put to the torture; besides which —"

"Hush!" interrupted the Novice, who involuntarily shuddered at their conversation, "we

approach the garden-gate. Silence, I pray you, or we may be overheard."

To his astonishment the command was obeyed instantly, and without a murmur, as though the holy crucifix which hung at his side had been suddenly changed into a goodly broad-sword, and himself transformed into a bluff and bearded captain.

They proceeded thus in silence, and soon reached the garden-gate. Isidore led them cautiously through the garden to the chapel. He could plainly perceive that his uncle had secretly aided him during his absence, for none of the brotherhood were in the sanctuary, nor loitering about upon the terrace beneath the wall, as was usually the case at this hour.

The Novice guided the hirelings, whom he had been so mysteriously appointed to direct, down the winding-stair to the dungeon door; he placed the large brazen key in the lock, and

essayed to turn it, but his hand trembled so violently that he was forced to leave the task to his less scrupulous companions. The ruffians seemed to have received instructions not to suffer the Marquis to catch a glimpse of his captors; for, ere they bore him into the dungeon, one of the number took the lantern from the hand of the Novice, and hid it beneath his cloak, thus leaving them for a while in total darkness. The air streamed cold and damp through the grating of the cell, and, overcome by his feelings, Isidore did not enter. The villains, however, were well versed in all the horrid mysteries of their craft, for the youth scarcely knew what had passed, when he heard the sudden closing of the heavy door, and was satisfied that all was over. He drew the key from the lock, and then felt as though he would have gladly relinquished all hope of future honour and preferment, only for the

privilege of resigning to another the task of holding in durance the unfortunate Marquis de Croix; and he returned through the cold dark passages, almost wishing that he could have exchanged situations with the unhappy sufferer.

He now led the ruffians once more through the gardens, and felt some relief in bidding them farewell. He watched their progress down the gentle slope towards the wood, and when they were lost to sight amid its depths, it seemed as if half his load of guilt were already removed. The same silence reigned around, as with bolder step he once more approached the convent. At the hall-door he found the Prior himself awaiting his return. Still true to his text, the worthy Father laughed and chuckled in uncontrolled delight, although the wan and haggard looks of the Novice would, perhaps, at any other time,

have been sufficient to check its display; but just now he seemed too entirely occupied by his own secret joy to take much heed of Isidore's appearance, for suddenly taking his hand, and pressing it warmly, he exclaimed,

"Ah, Isidore, dearest, thou wert evidently designed by Nature to become a bishop! How well thou hast succeeded in thy enterprise! I have been keeping watch lest any one else should behold thee. Verily the cavalier, thy patron—ha-ha!—take note—the cavalier cannot choose but be content with thy exertions, albeit he is so hard to please. Ah, well-a-day! thou wilt soon be able, when thy head is adorned with the mitre, to give the law to thy old uncle himself; but bless thee, boy, it is all I wish to see! At a fitting opportunity I will give thee some instructions whereby thou must govern thy future behaviour; but come now, ere yet the brothers can wonder at thy ab-

sence ; they are all at supper in the refectory, and right glad will they be to behold thee : I told them thou wert at prayer in thy cell, and laughed to hear them marvel at thy early piety, and extol thy devotion to the skies, when all the while thou wert engaged on thy somewhat unholy errand !"

He again burst into a fit of laughter, but Isidore shrank from his unseasonable merriment, and entered the refectory, where the monks were all assembled. The eager congratulations of the worthy brothers, their loud and extravagant praises greatly increased his annoyance : they would have proceeded to condolences on the unusual paleness of his countenance equally loud and extravagant, but the Prior perceiving this, goodnaturedly came to his aid, and proceeded to read aloud two homilies of his own composing, and then expounded a chapter or two from the Lives of the Saints : he gave

them from memory a long and elaborate description of a Roman tile which he had picked up in one of his solitary rambles to the *Camp de César*, and of which he intended to write the whole explanation in Latin verse, and then dismissed them hurriedly to rest, Isidore as well as the others, to avoid suspicion, under pretence of the necessity of rising betimes on the morrow to receive the King, who had signified his intention of arriving with his train almost at the first peep of dawn, even to early matins.

The Novice gladly sought the solitude of his own cell, where he hoped to obtain repose after the fatigue and anxiety of the day; but that night his slumbers were short and broken, and even his dreams were haunted by the pale emaciated form of the Marquis de Croix, now pining in that solitary dungeon, now writhing in all the agonies of torture.

CHAPTER III.

THE sudden disgrace of the young Marquis de Croix, and his abrupt dismissal from Court, was the general theme of wonder and speculation among the courtiers. By some it was ascribed to displeasure on the part of the Queen-mother; others thought it might be traced to a private pique of the Cardinal de Richelieu, who at that time possessed almost more power than the King himself. Some gave out dark hints concerning the beautiful Mademoiselle de Pont Courlai, his niece; but no one seemed disposed to tax the King with caprice or injustice.

It was well known that his Majesty had ever entertained the warmest friendship for the Marquis de Croix; it was, moreover, remarked, that he had frequently expressed sorrow at the necessity of being thus harsh towards one whom he had hitherto regarded with esteem; and he was rather pitied than blamed by those who knew him, for it was felt that the banishment of the favourite was not his own act, and that he suffered from the separation perhaps even more than the Marquis himself. But there were few who dared breathe such thoughts aloud, through terror of the Cardinal; and it was afterwards forgotten in the astonishment occasioned by the marriage of his niece with the Marquis de Combalet, nephew to the Duke de Luynes.

It was even whispered that, however great the surprise, none were more astonished than the happy man himself; for he had long ceased

to hope for such good fortune, she having evinced the utmost repugnance to the alliance, and all his advances having ever been treated with the most marked contempt both on the part of the lady and on that of her all-powerful uncle. Fate, however, will often dispense the greatest blessings when least expected: the great beauty—the rich heiress—did at length become Marquise de Combalet, to the despair of half the young Seigneurs of the Court, and the breaking of some score or two of hearts, which, however, belonging to younger sons of poor nobility, increased rather than diminished the value of her smiles to others.

Her arrival at Court had created no small sensation, and whatever might have been the unfavourable impressions respecting her, they all vanished at first sight of her angelic beauty. Who could have thought that there lurked the least evil passion beneath that look of inno-

cence? Who could have believed, that saw her on the night of the Mardi Gras amid the revels at the Palace, seemingly joyous and happy as youth and innocence could make her, far excelling in loveliness all the fair dames gathered round her, that envy and hatred, and hot desire of revenge, were all hid beneath that seemingly guileless smile and treacherous *abandon?* She was the brightest star of the revels. All eyes were turned upon her light and graceful form as she floated through the dance with the young and handsome Comte de Mireville. All smiled in very admiration as the bright flashing of her eye and the dimpling of her cheek would from time to time give token that the young Cavalier her partner, who was whispering softly in her ear, possessed a power of pleasing even beyond what personal grace and beauty could bestow.

Combalet alone, who sat silent and solitary

in a retired corner of the room, watched with jealous and jaundiced eye the giddy fluttering of the vain coquette, and trembled but to reflect that upon her wavering inconstant love he had staked the whole of his earthly happiness. He turned away heart-sickened from the congratulations of his friends, to watch with bitter feelings the deepening colour on her cheek, and the warm smile that gathered round her lip as the honied words of the flatterer met her ear.

It was her first appearance at Court since her marriage, and she was then in all the dazzling glow of her youthful beauty. It appeared as if no one was able to resist the fascination of her manners; for Marie de Medicis, who was known to be a sworn enemy to all youthful loveliness, had loaded her with honours from her first introduction at the Palace, and had given her the situation of *Dame d'Atours*, that she might be always about her

person. This last and most signal distinction of all had raised up many and bitter enemies to the beautiful Marquise, even among those who had once been her most ardent admirers. The Comtesse Dufargis, who, from long and faithful service and great experience, had almost reckoned upon this appointment, suddenly discovered that the Marquis de Combalet,—*homme d'un petit mérite*,—was not the *parti* originally intended for the beauteous de Pont Courlai; she next wondered that the Marquis de Croix, young, rich, and powerful, and the most desirable alliance among all the *haute noblesse*, should have been overlooked by the shrewd and calculating Cardinal; then remembered that the latter had owned to having had a serious conversation with the Marquis on the very day before his banishment, and finally spread a report that the Marquis de Croix had dared to reject the alliance of the Cardinal's

own niece, and for this had incurred the displeasure of his Eminence, who had ruined his credit with the King: a report which had served to annoy and irritate Combalet, who was already soured by disappointment, and to excite the most bitter hatred in the bosom of his wife.

All cause of grief and heartburning seemed however for the present dismissed from her mind, and she listened with evident complacency to the soft whisperings of the Comte de Mireville. The dancing ceased, but the Comte was as yet led captive by the charms of *la belle Marquise*, and still continued by her side.

"Combalet is sulky to-night," she said at length, as in following the stream of promenaders to and fro in the ball-room, they passed the spot where the Marquis was seated watching her movements with gloom and jea-

lousy: "Poor Combalet! he never dances, and what is worse—for I can readily forgive him that offence—he likes not to see others merry. See how darkly he looks at me each time we pass him: let us leave him to his dismal dreams, and seek my uncle's presence; he, at all events, will not refuse to greet me with a smile."

This was said loud enough for Combalet to hear. And she turned and smiled to behold him irresolute; half inclined to follow her to make peace, yet hesitating through fear of ridicule. She left the ball-room leaning on de Mireville's arm, conscious that she was planting another sting in the bosom of her husband, yet thinking only of her own conquests and her own appearance.

They entered the smaller apartment, where the Royal party were engaged at play. The King was seated at a table, deeply absorbed in

the mysteries of the game, and the young Queen was seated by his side, apparently watching, with affectionate interest, the chances which he possessed of winning. Opposite sat the Cardinal de Richelieu, with whom his Majesty had condescended to try his fortune; and by his side was the proud Marie de Medicis, bending from her lofty state, and gazing with anxiety into the hand of her favourite. There was a fine contrast in the group, and such as a painter would have delighted to pourtray. On the one hand, the pensive countenance of Louis le Juste, so pale that, in the strong glare of light from the silver lamp above his head, it appeared almost ghastly; his sober garb, which, even on this occasion of festivity, was of sombre hue and simple fashion; and the blooming face of his youthful bride, over which a slight shadow was just stealing at sight of the adverse fortune of the King, even

though it was merely pastime. Her magnificent attire seemed to assort but ill with the plain suit of her royal consort; but the contrast was not observed, for she was evidently wholly unoccupied by her own appearance, and gave not one thought to her splendid robe, nor the point lace and jewels with which it was adorned.

The casual beholder would have said that the royal pair strongly resembled each other; and sitting thus side by side, the resemblance was striking. Both were young —both were beautiful; the features of both wore the same calm and subdued expression; their eyes were of different colour, but possessed that same passionate depth which bespeaks so forcibly a sad and melancholy temperament.

The opposite side of the table presented a far different aspect. There, all was gold and

glitter: the flashing of jewels, and the flaunting of gay colours; the fiery soutane of the Cardinal of the brightest scarlet; and the robe of the Queen-mother of a gaudy yellow, with a stomacher of gems, which glittered with each movement, and reflected all the soft colours of the rainbow each time they caught the rays of light from the lamp above.

The room was crowded with the immediate suite of the King. Some few of the most distinguished were engaged at play at the farther end, and the rest were gathered around in groups, betting upon the chances of their respective favourites; while some were watching with interest the skill displayed by the Cardinal and his royal antagonist.

Richelieu raised his eyes and smiled as Madame de Combalet entered the apartment. He seemed overcome by some sudden emo-

tion; and had it not been for the vigilance of Marie de Medicis, he would have lost the game, for he laid down a wrong card, which she, however, hastily took up and placed with the others in his hand.

"Your Eminence enjoys your usual good fortune to-night," said the King, when the game was at an end, and the Cardinal was gathering the *rouleaux* from the table; "but your Eminence is destined to good fortune in every thing. See you, all my skill was of no avail: I could not even for once avert my own ill-luck."

"Will it please your Majesty to take your revenge?" said the Cardinal; "although I should not ask it, seeing that the tide of fortune is certainly in my favour; but your Majesty must have perceived that my success was owing to my care *in well guarding my King*."

The remark, although applicable to the Cardinal's manner of playing, was intended by him to be taken as a personal compliment by his Majesty; for he bowed low as he uttered the observation, and smiled courteously, although it was perhaps difficult to decide whether the pleasure of winning did not add something to his good-humour.

"True, your Eminence," retorted Louis, rather more sharply than was his wont; "but still would you have lost if you had not been *so well guarded by your Queen.*"

The Cardinal essayed to laugh, and so did his Majesty, but with no very great success; for it requires no small degree of philosophy to lose with temper, and bear with the evident triumph of your conquering adversary. Marie de Medicis darted a look of indignation at her son, which he, for once, amply returned.

"But will not your Majesty take your revenge?" said the sweet and meek voice of Anne of Austria, who did not perceive the gathering storm; "you, who in general play so skilfully, may perchance have better luck in another trial."

"Why do you not join the dance, Madam?" said Louis, turning quickly round, as though he had not known that the Queen had been seated the whole evening by his side.

"Nay, your Majesty, I should find but little pleasure in the dance, when you were absent, and all my best friends banished from my side!"

The look of the King softened as he gazed at her brimming eye. He had, as was usually the case, vented all the spleen which had been excited by his haughty mother, to whom he dared not show it, upon his mild and unoffending wife; but he already repented his momen-

tary irritation, and added somewhat more courteously,

"Your Majesty will pardon my refusal to take the cards again to-night. It already grows late, and if we enter upon another game, we shall not rise betimes to-morrow. We must not forget it is for such sins that we go to mourn and do penance in all humility."

"But your Majesty will surely stop and play the single game of cavagnole you promised me?" said the Queen, all her good-humour instantly returning at that single kind word from her royal husband.

The dark Italian brow of Marie de Medicis contracted to a deadly frown. She had ever feared beyond all things that Louis would be charmed from her iron sway by the youth and gentle temper of the Queen. The King was about to yield, for of himself he was

affectionate, and moreover indulgent to those he loved; but he suddenly caught the angry flashing of his mother's eye, of which, from his earliest infancy, he had been accustomed to stand in awe, and he resisted the impulse which prompted him to return the young Queen's soft and gentle tone. "Nay, Madam," he answered, "I cannot play again to-night; it is almost time to retire."

Had Anne of Austria possessed a greater knowledge of human nature, or perceived the dread in which the King stood of the growing ill-humour of Marie de Medicis, she would at once have taken his refusal; but she was young and utterly inexperienced. She had been accustomed all her life to indulgence; was the idol of a doting father—the pride of a yet fonder brother; from a happy home, amidst adoring friends, she had been suddenly transported to a foreign Court, where many were enemies, and all were strangers. She was un-

equal to the task of steering her course aright amid the dangers and difficulties by which she was continually beset, and would often suffer her love for the King and her jealousy of his minister to get the better of her discretion. She persisted in her request, and without perceiving that her pertinacity increased the King's annoyance, she added with almost childish pettishness: "But your Majesty should then have played with me before you played with the Cardinal."

Richelieu looked up as he heard himself mentioned. His eye met that of the King, and all the philosophy of the latter could not enable him to meet that cold sarcastic gaze; it irritated him even more than the fiery glance of Marie de Medicis, and caused him perhaps to lose sight of that deference which was due to his royal consort, at all events before this assemblage of strangers.

"Your Majesty is over pressing," he exclaim-

ed angrily: "it is our pleasure to play with the Cardinal, and often when it suits us not to try our skill with any one beside."

"Methinks, in truth, her Majesty exacts too much," said Marie de Medicis, taking this opportunity of revenging her favourite, and glancing spitefully towards Anne of Austria: "she ever seems to claim all his Majesty's gracious love, and deems the time wasted that is bestowed on older friends and nearer relatives!"

This sharp and galling speech was more than the vexed and wounded spirit of the youthful Queen could bear. She turned one meek appealing look to Louis le Juste, and hiding her face in her broidered kerchief, burst into a flood of tears! Presently taking the arm of Mademoiselle de Hautefort, she hurried from the apartment, still sobbing, in mingled sorrow and indignation.

Louis was evidently in an awkward predicament. His soul was tender, and a woman's tears had always the power to soften his most gloomy moods. He turned, and fidgeted, and finally pushed his chair to some little distance from the table. Such scenes of domestic discord were of too frequent recurrence to excite much astonishment among the courtiers, but all expected that he would have resented this unsought interference on the part of his mother, for at first he seemed ready to give vent to his displeasure, but he afterwards checked himself, perhaps deeming it the wiser course to remain in peace; and, without noticing the departure of the Queen, he suddenly broke the silence which this circumstance had occasioned, by exclaiming, evidently with an effort to appear unconcerned,

"We must rise betimes to-morrow; hear you that, gentlemen?" turning to a table

where two young noblemen had hitherto been playing at dice with all the noisy eagerness which characterizes games of hazard. "These trifling amusements must be forsworn for some time to come; we have had enough of pleasure, and we must now betake ourselves to devotion."

"The greater reason for taking advantage of the little time that remains for pleasure," said the Cardinal, who was elevated by his continued success at cards, and hoped his good luck might continue. "Will your Majesty please to try another game?"

"No, no—I have already refused," interrupted the King hastily; "and besides, I hate cards—they breed quarrels and dissension: we had far better compose our minds to peace, in order that we may be the better prepared to obtain absolution to-morrow."

He sighed deeply, and leaning his arm on

the elbow of his chair, seemed absorbed in reflection; but the Cardinal de Richelieu bending forward to speak in a whisper to Madame de Combalet caused him to turn his eyes in the same direction. Their gaze, by chance, fell on the Comte de Mireville, who was standing by her side, and once more rallying his spirits, he exclaimed, goodnaturedly—

"Ah! M. de Mireville! we are right glad to see you here; we were unprepared for the pleasure of this visit: we did not expect it while a single string was left upon the viols; you seldom grant us your company till the musicians themselves are grown weary. But verily we honour your taste—'tis a goodly sign when such sounds are sweeter music to the youthful ear than the rattle of the dice-box."

"There are some, your Majesty, who think such a taste a sure mark of poverty, and, to

speak truth, dancing *is* a right royal pastime for those whose fortunes are *un peu rétrécies*, costing, at the most, a sprained ankle, or—" glancing at Madame de Combalet, "or, what is more serious, a wounded heart!"

The King smiled upon his young friend—he envied the buoyant spirits which thus enabled him to make a jest of what to others was a grievous misfortune.

"Would that I had thy gaiety, de Mireville!" said he; "but alas! few are the favoured mortals who can boast such an eternal flow of mirth; even in thy own family thou art the only one. Poor Aline de Mireville, thy sister! It was some very sudden blight over her youthful spirit, which caused her thus to leave us and seek the cloister! There is something mysterious in this sudden vocation—what thinks your Eminence?" turning to the Cardinal, "you, who have had so many consci-

ences in charge, think you that the sudden enthusiasm of Aline de Mireville could have been sincere ?"

There was nothing extraordinary in the question, it excited no astonishment among the group of listeners gathered round, for Louis was always remarkable for investigating the motives which led to monastic retirement ; and yet the Cardinal de Richelieu, all proud and powerful as he was, turned aside from the inquiring glance by which it was accompanied, the colour forsook his cheek, and he stammered out as though he scarcely knew what he was saying :

" So please your Majesty ! I believe that none are forced : Mademoiselle de Mireville followed her own choice ; but I think—that—that the love of a religious life is peculiar to the family—for the younger brother is ——Ha ! M. de Mireville, have you not a

brother in the Convent at Saint Firmin?—a Novice?—Isidore de Mireville, about to take the vows?"

"Ha! what does your Eminence then know him?" exclaimed the Count, his fine features brightening up with pleasure. "Poor Isidore! he should not be devoted to the Church if—but psha!—he could not be better provided for, if your Eminence would but condescend to notice him." He spoke with all the eagerness of affection, and his arm was almost involuntarily disengaged from that of his beautiful companion, while he leaned forward as if to read the countenance of the Cardinal. There was a glance of peculiar meaning passed between Marie de Medicis and Madame de Combalet, and it was thought to be occasioned by surprise at this unintentional breach of politeness on the part of the proverbially courteous Comte de Mireville.

The Cardinal smiled coldly; he appeared to have regained composure, and yet was evidently anxious to change the subject of conversation.

"Yes, yes, I will," he answered; "but—but *à propos*, it is your uncle who is the Prior of Saint Firmin, is it not, M. de Mireville?"

"Ah! your Eminence is acquainted with the most minute affairs of the Church, even to the very christian name of a novice of Saint Firmin. You speak truly, the Prior of the Convent is, indeed, my mother's brother: he is old, your Eminence, and has nothing more to look for,—but for our blooming Isidore, it is there he has laid up all his hopes; and, indeed, the youth would well repay any exertion in his behalf. So guileless, and so sanguine; so humble, yet withal so full of noble ambition!"

The Count paused, for he perceived that

his Majesty was gazing in his face so intently that the eyes of the rest of the company were turned in the same direction; and he felt somewhat surprised at having thus become an object of attention to all. But, even when he had ceased speaking, the King still continued to look, and to look as though he had hoped to hear more of those affectionate pleadings, and sinking back softly in his chair, he murmured to himself—"Gaston of Orleans! this is a brother's love! it was just so we used to feel!"

The continued silence of the young Count, however, recalled him to himself, and he proceeded aloud:

"Fear not, M. de Mireville, we will observe the Novice to-morrow; when we seek the Convent of Saint Firmin, we will take him under our especial protection. His Eminence will doubtless aid us."

"I desire no greater pleasure, your Majesty," interrupted the Cardinal hastily, and slightly colouring.

"And Aline!" continued the King, whose heart seemed now unlocked with the tender emotions which he had just experienced, "the sweet and bright-eyed Aline!—what can we do, your Eminence? Her absence has caused a sad vacancy at Court. I verily believe that it is the maiden's departure which has so saddened her Majesty of late. Is not this your real opinion, Madam?" turning to Marie de Medicis.

"The will of Heaven must not be opposed, Louis!" replied the Queen, not without betraying some little agitation, which in her was rather unusual.

"Nay, nay; I mean no opposition," returned Louis meekly; "but, perhaps, the maiden is young: in short, she scarcely can know as yet her own welfare. It is sore cause

of grief to her Majesty to lose her most favoured maid of honour; we—we had thought —that is if your Eminence would but approve of the measure,—in fact, her Majesty has been rather pressing on this point,—she would like to see her protegée once more before her fate is fixed. We could consult the Abbess; they tell us—for the Queen has made all inquiries —that the holy Mother is kind and indulgent, and will question the fair Novice in all sincerity, and ascertain if it be really love of devotion, or a mere fit of girlish enthusiasm."

"No, it must not be! it must not be, your Majesty!" exclaimed the Cardinal, who had been engaged rubbing his hands one in the other the whole time the King was speaking; but he now suddenly ceased, and grasped the table with energy, as he added, "I pray your Majesty to desist from such an idea; 'twould be an offence to the Church; 'twould be much

condemned by all; nay, I pray your Majesty think no more of this plan!"

The concluding words had the effect of dispelling the frown which had gathered on the brow of the King, and his rising anger turned again to sorrow; he sighed deeply: "Well," said he, "then it must be so; her Majesty must give up her scheme of having her favourite once more at Court. We must be content with the return of only one of our loved and valued friends instead of the two, as we—But I see your Eminence does not deem it prudent that I should tell of all our projects of peace and reconciliation."

"Why not, why not?" interrupted the Cardinal hastily; "why should your Majesty not do as best pleases you? I should delight to tell it, for of all things I love to see peace and goodwill subsist between your Majesty and all your subjects. Gentlemen," he continued, in

the same eager haste, without allowing the King time to speak, "we shall have an old friend once more among us to-morrow: you will marvel at his Majesty's clemency,—he has pardoned the Marquis de Croix!—we shall see him at Saint Firmin. Now is it not a right Royal mercy?"

There was a general exclamation of pleasure at this intelligence, for the Marquis de Croix was greatly beloved by all. The Cardinal smiled grimly to witness this joy; and Madame de Combalet coloured deeply, and bit her lips; while Marie de Medicis could not refrain from laughing outright.

The King was evidently much delighted. "His Eminence has spoken truth," said he; "we shall have our own de Croix once more beside us; he will return to all his honours and distinctions from the moment of his first rejoining us."

"I have been thinking, your Majesty," said the Cardinal drily, "that in our zeal we have overlooked one most likely accident, — ha! ha!—but doubtless it is my anxiety; however, supposing the Marquis should not choose to come at all!"

The prelate laughed in manifest glee, yet no one joined in his merriment, except Marie de Medicis, and her laughter was loud and long-continued.

The King, perhaps, was piqued at this ill-timed mirth, for he exclaimed rather warmly, "Nay, nay, my Lord, the Marquis de Croix has ever been one of our most loving friends, one who would fly to obey our slightest bidding. He is neither sullen nor vindictive. Why should he refuse to receive our offers of renewed favour? He knows well that it is not to every one we would thus make the first advances. It would be an indignity he

dare not offer to his sovereign, an offence meriting far greater punishment than a mere temporary banishment from Court."

"Pardon me, your Majesty, I did but speak perhaps unwittingly, and from excess of caution. I have reason to believe, nay more, I speak from my own observation of his character,—he is arrogant and headstrong, and, when it so pleases him, he can be rebellious and revengeful; trust me, he who could thus defy the power of the Church would not scruple to offend——"

"Why, your Eminence seems suddenly to have taken a hatred to poor de Croix; formerly it was our pleasure to observe your mutual friendship!"

The Cardinal again smiled with the same dark expression, and Madame de Combalet blushed more deeply than before.

"It was but natural that I should feel an interest for one whom your Majesty honoured

with your especial favour, and also that I should feel indignant even at the prospect of any slight towards your Majesty," said Richelieu.

"Louis was ever heedless and unsuspecting in his friendships," said Marie de Medicis.

The King was a little shaken in his faith. "But we certainly did think de Croix had some little love for us," said he, evidently beginning to feel doubtful. "He would not surely brave our displeasure thus far. Such open defiance would cause an irreparable breach between us. It is an offence we could not overlook, even though the offender were our own brother!"

"For my own part, I think it would be a bad example to suffer such neglect of your royal commands to pass unnoticed. I know not why, but I cannot help imagining that the Marquis will not heed your gracious Majesty's summons."

" Nay, think it not, your Eminence," said the King, colouring as deep as scarlet, and hastily rising from his seat to put an end to the conversation, " think it not, I pray you. The Marquis de Croix is a man of honour and a gentleman: no one knows better than himself the respect due to his sovereign. No, rely upon it, we shall see him at Saint Firmin, and all will be forgotten."

An evident sneer passed over the countenance of the Cardinal, but the King did not seem to observe it.

" Gentlemen," he continued, " it is time to retire. The holy Prior of Saint Firmin must not have cause to chide our delay to-morrow. We wish you good even, and may grace and peace be with you! My Lord Cardinal, we will break the disappointment to her Majesty concerning Aline de Mireville; we must not go to Beauvais:—it will be a sore grief; but

we must not presume to mar a sincere vocation."

Thus saying, his Majesty withdrew, the *huissiers* throwing open the *portes-battantes* of the gallery, and the lacqueys advancing with flambeaux to conduct the rest of the company to their respective apartments.

The Cardinal took the lead, conducting the Queen-Mother; by those who followed they were observed to whisper together as they walked along the gallery, and even when they had reached the door of her Majesty's suite of apartments, where, of necessity, they were compelled to part, they remained still conversing eagerly, suffering the company to pass by unheeded.

Madame de Combalet, who had left the card-room with the Comte de Mireville, suddenly quitted his side, and ran to join them. M. de Mireville created much diversion by his undis-

guised indignation ; for the treacherous coquette was presently heard to laugh with all her might, although the moment before she had been engaged whispering some secret in his ear, of which he had affected a great mystery, in order to create jealousy in others. The old Comtesse Dufargis perceived his chagrin : she pulled him by the sleeve, and drew him into a corner :

" You are a young man, M. de Mireville," said she, in a low tone of voice, " and may not refuse to take advice from one who was your mother's playmate. Shun that proud deceitful Madame de Combalet ; she has the smile and alluring tones of the Syren ; but that smile is only assumed to deceive, and those tones to betray ; go, therefore, to-morrow straight from Saint Firmin to the nunnery at Beauvais, and see if Aline be really there."

She hurried forward, leaving him excited by

a strong feeling of curiosity, mingled with a dread of some undefined danger now pending over the head of one whom he so dearly loved. He did not hear the noisy laughter of those to whom he had been an object of envy during the whole evening, and who were now congratulating him with merry raillery upon his universal conquests among the ladies of the Court, from Madame de Combalet, the youngest and most agreeable, to Madame Dufargis, the oldest and most ——— but they did not particularise further, for the Comtesse herself joined them at that moment.

The Comte de Mireville was left alone, standing in the gallery. The words of the Comtesse Dufargis had smitten upon his heart, for the wily artifice of the Marquise de Combalet had extracted promises, even in that short interview, which rendered it impossible for him to follow this new friend's advice, and he remained

musing for some time, apparently the only one awake in the whole palace. But he was young and volatile; and it is to be feared, that when the first surprise had dissipated, and he had left the spot to seek his chamber, he thought far more of the dark brown eyes of the Marquise de Combalet, than of the kindly warning of the Comtesse Dufargis.

CHAPTER IV.

THE Cardinal de Richelieu likewise retired to his own apartment in peace and content; he wished not for repose, he knew that it would be a hopeless task to seek it, and, dismissing his attendant, he threw himself into the large arm-chair before the blazing fire, and began to ruminate with that sweet self-complacency which a man may be supposed to feel when all his most ambitious schemes have succeeded, and the object upon which he had set the wishes of his heart is nigh fulfilment.

The apartment was small,—a kind of study

fitted up for his temporary visits to Chantilly; it was the closet of the Minister of State, not of the Minister of Religion. There were bureaus, and chests, and strong coffers, and books and papers were strewn in every direction; the table near which the Cardinal was seated was covered with letters and papers of importance, some tied in bundles, others scattered about in confusion, and even the very floor beneath gave token of the Minister's indefatigable industry. A large map of the kingdom of France lay open to its full extent, upon which were traced outlines and references in red ink. He had apparently been engaged upon this when summoned below, for the pen lay negligently across it, and the large glaring blot upon the surface of the paper, showed that he had laid it down with haste and inattention.

A bookcase stood in a corner of the room, it was crowded with ponderous volumes, all dis-

playing the same dark and dingy exterior. The walls were adorned with maps and plans of the coast and most celebrated fortifications on the frontiers, among which a plan of La Rochelle was the most conspicuous, and like the chart upon the table,was covered with his own suggestions and remarks, drawn with the pen and ink. Models of fortresses cut in wood, and smaller ones of cannon, and other warlike implements, in all kinds of metal, served as ornament; and seemed strange company for the broad scarlet hat which lay in the midst, and denoted the high rank in the Church to which the occupant of that chamber had attained.

The same strange anomaly was observable throughout. A highly-finished drawing of the prison-chamber at *l'île Sainte Marguerite* served to mark the prayer to his patron Saint in his *breviaire*, and his amber cross and crystal rosary were used to keep open a worm-eaten

volume of Polybius, which he had been attentively perusing. The symbols of peace which belonged to the Cardinal, and the instruments of death which belonged to the Minister of war, seemed everywhere to struggle for supremacy. Upon a marble slab stood a richly-chased silver font for holy-water, with its usual number of cherubim, seraphim, and guardian angels; and by its side was the model of a newly-invented instrument of torture, just arrived from Italy, to cure the refractory state-prisoners in the Bastile of any lurking fondness for keeping secrets. Across this was negligently flung a gilt Venetian chain, a minute specimen of fetters and manacles, of exquisite workmanship and ingenious contrivance, by which all hope of escape or liberty must have been at once dispelled from the mind of the unhappy culprit by whom they might happen to be worn.

There was a door at the farther end of the

apartment; it stood ajar, but all was darkness beyond, except where the stream of light poured in from the Cardinal's lamp, and fell upon the rich hangings of the bed and the velvet-covered *prie Dieu* which stood by its side, and showed that this was his Eminence's sleeping-apartment.

Richelieu sat for a while absorbed in thought. Any one would have imagined that he was buried in slumber; his elbow rested upon the table, and his hand supported his head, while the other arm was carelessly thrown over the back of his chair.

His Eminence was at that time a very young man; in short, it was startling to see the face of youth smiling above the gorgeous robe of scarlet with which his person was invested. His complexion was sallow, partly the effect of intense application, partly from the disease to which he had been subject from his earliest

infancy. His countenance at the present moment was calm and placid, and even decked with a self-admiring smile ; but a keen observer might nevertheless have perceived that the lines of care and anxious thought, and the furrows ploughed by fierce and stormy passions, were all deeply stamped upon his brow. Altogether his countenance was that of one who was a lover of the world's distinctions, and a votary, moreover a successful one, of ambition, and told not that for Religion's sake he had been used to watch and pray. His dark eye flashed and sparkled even in the flickering light of the fire, and betrayed plainly, that although he appeared so still and motionless, his mind was busy and slumbered not.

The time had passed in meditation. The small ivory hour-glass which he had turned almost by habit on his entrance, had already run down, and its sand was once more at rest ;

the wood upon the hearth had ceased to throw out the bright and glittering sparks, or to send up the cheerful blaze ; it crackled no more, but had sunk to silence, and was smouldering away ; the flame of the lamp began to grow unsteady, as it was gradually sinking into the socket. The deepest stillness reigned around ; it was unbroken even in the distance, except by the faint and measured tread of the sentinel pacing the stone pavement of the gallery outside the King's apartment.

The loud stroke of the palace clock was the first sound that aroused him from his reverie, and seemed to recall him to himself. He changed his position, and rubbed his hands, evidently well pleased with his own reflections ; and, after a moment's pause, he looked anxiously around, as if in doubt that even in spite of the deep silence some one might not be lurking near to observe his actions. He thrust his

hand eagerly into his bosom, and drew forth,—neither scapulary, nor crucifix, nor holy relique, such as would have been sought for beneath the *soutane* of the saintly Cardinal, but a closely-written paper, bearing the royal sign and seal, which he glanced over, while a smile of ineffable scorn curled his lip as he perused it.

"Ha! my Lord Marquis, you are mine! I have you here," said he in a whisper to himself. "The King having written this letter—ha! ha!—'would not pardon his own brother,' if he heeded not its contents. You were proud and arrogant, my Lord Marquis—you rejected my friendship, and thought to brave my power, but this scroll, all-worthless as it is, ruins you for ever, and amply revenges me."

He involuntarily snapped his fingers in triumph, and gave the paper a fillip as he folded it up and again hid it in his bosom. He then

rose from his seat, and paced up and down with his arms crossed over his breast.

"My revenge!—our revenge it will be," he continued. "Where are you now, my Lord Marquis? In our last interview you scorned my threats—you said that the King would see the injustice of his sentence, and that he would relent. You were right; the King has relented—nay, more, he has written to you with his own hand, and in spite of my counsels, so that I, at all events, shall not be blamed. You will doubtless fly to meet him, with all the gratitude due to him for such royal mercies—ha! ha! ha! That scrawled summons is your death-warrant, or I have up to this day been living in a dream, from which I must awaken to find I have been deceived, and that in reality I possess no power over Louis le Juste. Our revenge! I spoke aright—the Marquis has bearded me and rejected her. By the Mass!

it is enough to—but, psha! I am not, like himself, to seek for satisfaction by rushing on my adversary's sword; or, if perchance he be like me, cool and wary, to get inveigled in his toils. My vengeance is sometimes slow, but ever sure. The Marquis de Croix was lulling himself with hopes of honours renewed and fame restored, and as he read the King's written letter, fancied he should yet live to laugh the Cardinal to scorn. Fool! fool! fool! not to know that you were far less difficult to sweep away than the very worm beneath my feet!"

He paused; for even though there was no one nigh at hand to witness this burst of passion, yet he felt a kind of shame at having thus given way to it. In another moment he resumed,—

"And your fair bride, M. le Marquis, whom you have preferred to my niece—my sister's child,—she shall away to her peaceful convent

once more before you are released; it is better for her soul's salvation than the rude storms and buffetings of the world. No one at Court shall know of your insolence; it would set a bad example to the headstrong and unthinking. Ha! married in secret!—fled from her convent!—it shall never come to light. The Abbesse de Beauvais is discreet, and holds the character of her establishment dearer than life itself; I have commanded her silence, and she will not betray the secret; the sweet bird shall be restored to its cage once more, and never, by the Mass! to take wing again. Sauvan shall do it all; he made the discovery, and now has the Marquis de Croix safely lodged in the dungeons of Saint Firmin!—verily his services are beyond all price. The Novice was true, likewise; I am fortunate to be thus served—by—by honourable men! Had the youth betrayed me even to his companions in the enterprise,

he would before this have been much in the same condition as the Marquis: Sauvan would have seen to that; Sauvan can do every thing."

He stopped and trimmed the lamp, for the light was getting dim; he essayed to raise the flame, but the oil was too far spent. He seemed, however, too much occupied by his own thoughts to notice that ere long he would be left in darkness, for he again turned away to muse.

"Who could have thought," said he, "that in this world of bribery and artifice one could be found so utterly devoid of guile as the Novice of Saint Firmin, or one at the same time so cautious, yet so confiding, as his reverend uncle. I must watch to-morrow that the King does not hold too much converse with the youth; it would perhaps mar my plan, and all has hitherto so well succeeded. Madame

de Combalet has acted a goodly part: I knew she would; she is a woman, and the Marquis de Croix is one who prefers the pale and placid beauty, to the dark and dimpled loveliness—— Enough—enough, she would persecute him to the death."

He paused again, but this time it was to listen, for he had fancied that a low knocking at the outer door broke the silence which had hitherto been undisturbed. But it was not repeated while he listened, and he fancied that he had been deceived. He raked the few dying embers on the hearth, and turned up a few glowing sparks; but even these were short-lived, and vanished while yet he gazed upon them. He turned away to resume his measured tread to and fro in the apartment, for he was still indisposed to slumber. He again started as he moved from the fireplace, for the same knocking was again heard, and this time

the panelled door rattled louder than before: Richelieu listened patiently, but his heart beat faster than it had previously done.

"I am a fool!" he murmured, as this conviction forced itself upon his mind: "if any one were there, Desnoyers would have heard; he sleeps in the antechamber."

He comforted himself with this assurance; his mind was now quite at ease, and he was already beginning to lose himself in those sweet dreams in which he so loved to indulge, when that same sound once more engaged his attention, and he at length heard three distinct and gentle taps. He was now no longer doubtful; he trembled, for it was mysterious at this late hour of the night, and he had much ado to preserve his presence of mind. He approached the door: "Desnoyers, is it thee?" said he, in that soft tone which from long habit the attendant could always comprehend. No answer was returned. He applied his ear to

the key-hole,—he heard a noise of feet moving on the *parquet*. "It must be Desnoyers," said he, casting off the alarm which, he felt, in spite of himself, was getting the mastery over his feelings. He opened the door with a sudden movement, and recoiled a few paces with more surprise, and almost as much alarm as though he had beheld an armed host advancing to meet him at the dagger's point; for there, in the dim light, he beheld the pale and lovely countenance of the youthful Queen, Anne of Austria! Her eyes were swollen and red with weeping, and even as she stood she could not refrain from sobbing aloud. She laid her finger on her lips to check the expressions of astonishment which she perceived were about to burst from those of the Cardinal, and beckoned to some one who appeared to have been keeping watch at the outer door. It was Mademoiselle de Hautefort, who instantly advanced in silence, and both entering together into the Car-

dinal's study, closed the door, and gently drew the bolt.

The Cardinal did not speak for some minutes; he was lost in astonishment: he drew a chair for the Queen to be seated, but she waved her hand impatiently, and rejected the proffered kindness.

"Nay, my Lord Cardinal, I mean not to tarry," she said, endeavouring to collect herself; "my stay must be short; I come but for justice, and such as you must and shall grant ere I depart."

"I pray your Majesty compose yourself," said the Cardinal, who perceived the agitation under which she was labouring, and wished to gain time to prepare for the attack which it was evident he was about to sustain; and artfully pretending to feel anxiety for their situation alone, inquired of Mademoiselle de Hautefort if they had taken the precaution to engage Desnoyers to secrecy.

"He is not there," she replied; "the door was open, and we entered without a question."

"Ha! what!" exclaimed the Cardinal, "is it thus that he watches over my safety! he in whom I have been so long accustomed to confide, not there? Nay, nay! then he has surely been bribed to desert me!"

"Think it not, holy Cardinal," said Mademoiselle de Hautefort calmly, "it was a sudden determination of her Majesty thus to seek you; but we ascertained that the light was still burning in your study, we knew thereby that we should not disturb your repose."

"But why is Desnoyers absent? he would—"

"Chide not, your Eminence; it is the merriest night of the year; he is doubtless gone to the dance at the hamlet, for few have troubles like ———"

"Nay, dearest Clara," interrupted the Queen, "stand not thus to parley, we must not idly

waste the few short moments that we can call our own. I am here, your Eminence, to ask for justice! I seek no more, although I might call it tardy retribution! I might appeal to your tender feelings, and learn why you have not ceased to persecute one whose gentle innocence might have won mercy from the most savage bosom? Was it not enough that you compelled her to leave my side? Was it not enough that she was driven by you to hide her sorrows in a nunnery and feign devotion, while her heart was breaking?"

"And may I ask your Majesty, for it is natural I should feel curious on this point, who it is that I have thus served?" said the Cardinal in a sarcastic tone, and viewing with a cool triumphant sneer the passion to which the Queen was incautiously giving way.

"Aline de Mireville!" answered Anne of Austria boldly, without a moment's hesita-

tion, and losing sight of all discretion in her indignation; "his Majesty has informed me that—ha! ha! it makes me laugh—that your Eminence will not allow us to visit Beauvais to-morrow; and—and—my messenger has just returned thence, informing me that Aline de Mireville is no longer there. Your Eminence has now the motives of my visit."

The brow of the haughty Cardinal de Richelieu grew pale as ashes, his jet-black eye kindled with absolute fire as he darted a look of fury at the Queen, and exclaimed in a voice rendered tremulous by passion,

"And so—so it has pleased your Majesty to act thus rashly:—secret messengers arriving at midnight—and all to win a Novice from her vows! Verily it is a—"

"Nay, talk not thus to me!" interrupted the Queen, losing all patience. "Who is it that has thus driven me to act in secret, and to act with

caution—even to hold stealthy communication with an orphan girl of seventeen, my protegée? Whose counsels have almost wrought aversion in the heart of my once gentle Louis?—I marvel it should cause surprise to the Cardinal de Richelieu, when he must be well aware that to presume even to think for myself would cost me all that remains of the love I prize so highly!"

She paused, overcome by this violent transport of indignation.

"Secret messengers!" again murmured the Cardinal.

"Yes, your Eminence, I have my secret messengers! And have I not as great a right to the services of those who love me as your Eminence? The greater is the shame for those whose tyranny has forced me to be cunning and deceitful."

"Methought your Majesty had a husband,' returned the Cardinal coldly.

"Nay, there is no time for idle controversy," said the Queen, vexed to find that she had no chance of victory in an argument with Richelieu; "the subject upon which I came demands immediate attention—where is Aline de Mireville?"

"In the nunnery at Beauvais."

"It is false! it is false! my Lord Cardinal; she is banished no one knows whither!" said Anne of Austria, bursting into tears, partly with disappointment, partly also, it must be confessed, with passion.

"But your Majesty can surely have no cause to suppose—"

"It is even so with all whom we love. Do I not know that the Marquis de Croix owes his disgrace entirely to the hope which I entertained of seeing him one day united to Aline de Mireville?" said the Queen, with all a woman's spite, while she yet sobbed with vexation.

" Your Majesty's projects were vast indeed !"

" Taunt me not, my Lord Cardinal !" said the Queen, suddenly checking her tears, and looking him full in the face. " Am I to be thus treated ? You are, of a truth, somewhat over proud and insolent. I am your Queen. Your Eminence spoke truly—I have a husband, and he is your sovereign and master. Know you not that at this very moment I could summon his guards, and arrest you for your insolence ?"

" It were wisely done," replied Richelieu calmly, treating in his own mind the whole scene as a kind of wasp-like annoyance, from which he could free himself at pleasure by a steady well-directed blow—" It were wisely done to bring any one hither to find your Majesty standing at this hour of the night in the Cardinal de Richelieu's study !"

The Queen was silenced at once. She felt that her childish passion rendered her utterly powerless in the hands of a man like the Cardinal. The latter saw his advantage, and resolved to pursue it to the utmost.

"This is indeed folly," said he. "Why should your Majesty and myself ever continue to be enemies? I doubt not that a little explanation will clear the matter to our mutual satisfaction. To commence. If your Majesty's messenger had known any thing of convent rules, he would have understood that all worldly affairs are prohibited for a while. And this denying that Mademoiselle de Mireville was still at the convent, was, no doubt, an artifice of the *portière* to rid herself of inquiries, I ought to have been angry; nay, grievously offended at your Majesty's injurious suppositions and inferences concerning the Marquis de Croix. That again were

folly. We (his Majesty and I) have motives for our actions entirely different to those which seem ever uppermost in the female breast—love and marriage. As a proof, look at this letter." He drew forth from his bosom the paper which has been before mentioned. "This is a copy of the letter which the King has written with his own hand, to recall the Márquis from his banishment."

The Queen glanced over the paper in undisguised delight. The Cardinal saw it. It was enough.

"There are few who would be so merciful as our good and gracious Sovereign," he continued. "Such acts as these bespeak the goodness of his heart. It is not difficult to see the reason of the almost idolizing love which his subjects bear towards him!" The Cardinal struck the paper with his fingers, and laughed!

"It is true; my Louis is indeed so gentle and forgiving — is he not, your Eminence?" exclaimed Anne of Austria, looking up into his face with one of her sweetest smiles, her woman's heart completely opened at this praise of her adored Louis. She forgot all cause of anger with the Cardinal, in the pure delight of hearing the praises of one whom she loved beyond life itself, and listened to them with far more satisfaction than she would have done to any commendation of her own person or good qualities.

"Right glad am I that de Croix will join us once more. I see that I have wronged your Eminence, and I ask your pardon." She stretched forth her snowy hand, the Cardinal took it in seeming joy, and bending as in deep respect, kissed it fervently. The bright eyes of Anne of Austria sparkled with delight, but a cold wan smile passed over the calm and placid features of Mademoiselle de Hautefort.

"And may we not endeavour to have our Aline de Mireville back again?" whispered the Queen bewitchingly; "she might yet be his bride: I would furnish the dower sooner than the marriage should be missed. I know not his sentiments; but, tell it to no one, the maiden adores him! And when I saw her pine and fade away, I knew it was with the pangs of hopeless love, and it was my hope to see her one day his bride!"

"But stay!" said the Cardinal, who was bent upon getting the Queen wholly into his power at this interview, "your Majesty must promise me that you will not disturb the Novice in her retreat till the holy days of Lent be passed. I am a servant of the Church, and do not hold her glory cheaply. Your Majesty must promise this, and Mademoiselle de Mireville may then do as best beseems her. If she will return to the world after so long a retire-

ment, it will be a sure sign that it was not devotion which prompted her departure."

"But may I not even write to give her counsel and encouragement? Think on her tender age and inexperience!"

"Nay, your Majesty, why should I object to such a measure!" exclaimed the Cardinal, with an eagerness that should have excited suspicion; "my motives have been misconstrued, but my zeal for our holy religion has often led me into difficulties like these. Your Majesty has observed truly; the maiden is young, and as yet, wholly unable to judge for herself. I wish not to be harsh, more especially as your Majesty takes so great an interest in her welfare. I cannot certainly object to a mere letter. A word of kindness now and then—there can surely be no need of secrecy, unless, from prudence, your Majesty might not deem it advisable to create jealousy, and"—his Eminence

grew nervous and agitated—"if your Majesty would take advice from one who has secret messengers, you would employ those who are wary, and who know——"

"But I did so, your Eminence," said Anne of Austria, laughing goodnaturedly, and thinking the Cardinal's speech was mere badinage.

"What!" returned his Eminence smiling, "one who was scared at the first refusal of an old *portière*, whose very duty it is to keep all young cavaliers at bay."

The Queen was delighted at the idea, for she laughed in manifest glee as she exclaimed, "Nay, your Eminence, let her be never so old, she could not have mistaken poor Father Caussin for a young cavalier!"

The Cardinal started, and his eye brightened, and he now joined in the giddy mirth of the youthful Queen, evidently without effort; but Mademoiselle de Hautefort continued un-

moved, and sighed deeply, as she perceived her beloved mistress already ensnared beyond recovery in the toils of the wily Cardinal.

"Clara, dearest, the time wanes away; we must depart, or our absence will create surprise. My Lord Cardinal, I thank you for your kindness. I thought you had been my enemy, but I find I was deceived."

"Would that your Majesty had no greater enemy than myself!" said Richelieu, with a look full of serious meaning.

"Ah! I know well whom your Eminence glances at," said the Queen, without thinking of the advantage which might be taken of every word. "But I mind her not — she is but a woman; and one woman may always be a match for another."

She moved towards the door, and Mademoiselle de Hautefort, who seemed anxious to hurry her departure, instantly opened it.

"Farewell, your Eminence," continued her Majesty, as she stood upon the threshold; "you have relieved my mind of a load of anxiety. I will write to Aline de Mireville. And—ha, ha, ha!—and I must take care that this time the old *portière* does not refuse to admit *le père Caussin*, the young Cavalier."

She retired laughing, and taking the arm of Mademoiselle de Hautefort, hastened along the gallery. The Cardinal watched their almost noiseless progress, and when they were lost to sight, he shut the door, and exclaimed,

"Ay, do so, your Majesty. Write as often as it may please your royal hand to guide the pen, and—ha, ha!—and *I* will read the letters."

He laughed at first, and then his countenance assumed a dark expression, as he proceeded:

"This will not do; I must quickly put a stop to such bold measures on the part of her Majesty. Aline de Mireville shall take the

veil before the end of Lent. And, no more secret messengers; *I* will take charge of the worthy Father Caussin!"—his eye glanced, perhaps involuntarily, to the instrument of torture and the fetters which lay on the side-table.

"How well her Majesty betrayed her own little conspiracy! with what a graceful *naïveté* she revealed the very name of her secret messenger! When Mademoiselle de Hautefort is banished from Court, (which she shall be ere long,) the Queen will be a very puppet in my hands. She is a child in reason, and loves with all a child's affection. I soon perceived that praises of her husband were the only words which had the power to check her stormy passion; and these shall be lavishly administered on all occasions. I have been more than fortunate to-day; if my success continue such only beyond to-morrow, there will be two

kings in France, one wearing the crown, and one the scarlet hat."

Thus saying, he entered his chamber, and threw himself upon the bed. No farther event took place that night; but when the watch was changed, one of the sentinels declared that he was positive the Queen's maid of honour, Mademoiselle de Hautefort, had been crossed in love, for each time he passed the door of her apartment, he heard low sobs as of some one in distress; but his companions accused him of dreaming, as he had been often suspected of sleeping on his post, and therefore gave no credit whatever to this strange assertion.

CHAPTER V.

THE morrow was set apart as a day of fast and penance by the Church, but it is much to be questioned if the King's visit did not render it a day of greater festivity to the inhabitants of Saint Firmin than the one preceding. Before the first peep of dawn the villagers were all abroad, and heads were thrust from the little vine-covered windows to catch a glimpse of the royal procession, as it moved towards the convent. Very few of the monks had enjoyed their usual rest; the expectation of the King's arrival had kept them all awake the whole night,

and aroused them from their pallets before the stars had disappeared.

They were all drawn out in prim array by the worthy Prior, who was not a little proud of the consequence which this visit conferred upon him, and in spite of himself, for he was naturally meek and lowly, the prospective jealousy of the Abbots of Creil and Gouvieux, filled his mind with a worldly satisfaction for which he was at a loss to account; but to those who know the world, the chronicle will be sufficient which relates that the one had refused to lend his carved mahogany *lutrin* for the service of the chapel, the other his celebrated brass cauldron for the use of the kitchen.

The sun had scarcely arisen, when the first sound of the wheels of the royal carriage and the cracking of the whips were heard in the distance. In matters of devotion Louis was scrupulously punctual, and precisely at the

time appointed he drove through the *porte-cochère* of the quadrangle. His Majesty was no great lover of *faste* and idle luxury, more particularly upon occasions like the present; and the simplicity of his equipage and the scantiness of his retinue had caused some surprise among the simple villagers, and no doubt deprived him of half the demonstrations of loyalty with which they intended to have greeted him. He was, however, received with all kinds of respect by the Prior of Saint Firmin, who bowed to the very earth as he conducted him to the great hall. Far different was the *cortège* which accompanied the Cardinal; mounted attendants in gorgeous liveries followed the carriage of his Eminence, and the shouts of the foresters rent the air as he passed through the village, so loud and long that they had not subsided when he alighted at the hall door. The good fathers could not help feeling a great

desire to behold the Cardinal, who, being so exalted a functionary of the Church, was of more interest to them than even the King himself; and they all pressed forward, eager to catch the first glimpse of this holy personage.

Isidore de Mireville, as the humblest in rank of the whole establishment, stood last of all; he was therefore doomed to wait in patience while his Eminence advanced slowly up the passage to the chapel. His young heart beat with hope and pleasure, for to him there was no object on earth of such importance as the Cardinal de Richelieu, the model he had proposed to himself to imitate, whose steps he meant to follow, and whose rapid fortune he one day hoped to rival. He felt glad that he thus stood the lowest in rank, for the light shone full through the door from the chapel window opposite, and he was resolved to indulge in a long ardent gaze of admiration.

With envy he beheld in the distance the embroidered rochet and the rich camail, and looked down upon his own plain frock of black frieze with hatred and disgust: he involuntarily stepped forward with thoughtless eagerness, as the Cardinal approached the door, to catch a yet nearer view of this god of his idolatry; he gazed beneath the broad flat hat of glaring scarlet, and there beheld the stern and swarthy features of his nocturnal visitor, the cruel gaoler of the Marquis de Croix.

That dark and piercing eye met his, and seemed almost to gaze him into stone: he sank against the wall in mute and painful agony; he was literally struck motionless by astonishment. It was some moments ere he again recovered his senses, and then the Cardinal was gone; the monks had followed, and their low chant was already ascending to the chapel

roof. He was conscious that some one had been talking in his ears for the last five minutes, and now he found it was the voice of old Father Sévérin, who was highly incensed that his Eminence should have been compelled to turn aside to avoid stumbling over the novice Isidore, who had so rudely thrust himself in his passage.

Isidore entered the chapel: the King was seated on one of the high seats beside the altar, and the Cardinal de Richelieu was seated on the other; the stalls along the choir were fast filling by the noblemen in attendance upon his Majesty; and, perhaps, as the good Prior gazed around, the thought of douceurs and fees, with the prospect of a new silver plate to collect alms, a dress of gold-cloth for the Virgin Mary, and a ruby ring for the fore-finger of Saint Firmin, their beatified patron, would mingle with the more

devout abstractions of absolution and forgiveness. But Isidore de Mireville had one thought alone; he could not join in the chant—his voice was unheard in the response—he could not turn his eyes upon the book,—his thoughts were all centred in one object, and his gaze was riveted on that one sole engrossing object—the Cardinal, and still the Cardinal!

He did not see the laughing countenance which he had ever been accustomed to watch for with affectionate anxiety — that of his brother, who was making signs of recognition, but who turned away half indignantly to find the merry nods and winks and knowing looks, with which he had always delighted to overturn the gravity of the "bel Abbé," now of no avail.

The service proceeded, and, as it drew to a close, his Majesty was observed to look anxiously around and towards the door, and to

listen to every sound from without; for the stalls in the choir, twelve in number, were all filled with those who intended to remain to do penance, but the Marquis de Croix, whom he had invited, and promised to receive with open arms, was not there.

The Cardinal de Richelieu, however, appeared wholly unconcerned; he withdrew his eyes from his book of prayer but once, and that was when the Count de Mireville entered the chapel, and then he glanced towards Isidore. The youth shrank from the look which he directed towards him; he felt ashamed, nay, indignant with himself at the feeling which at that moment crept over him: it was a feeling of security to reflect that he had so well executed his mission, for that one single glance of the Cardinal spoke plainly his parting words: "Betray the trust I have reposed in you — breathe but a word of the service

upon which you are engaged, or shrink from the now performing it, and, by the most holy Mass! you will live to think of the Marquis de Croix in his solitary dungeon with a feeling of envy!"

The Novice grew more composed as the prayers drew to a close, for he felt eager to escape from that searching gaze; he felt relief when the solemn *Dominus vobiscum* was chanted forth from the lips of the Prior; and the response, *Et cum Spiritu tuo*, was the first in which he had joined during the whole service.

The company left the chapel, some to retire to solitary meditation, and others proceeded to the great hall to pay their respects to the Queen and the other ladies of the Court, who had arrived during their devotions to witness the penance. Louis, whose benevolence often served him in lieu of penetration, soon discovered

that his convent and its marvellous reliques were what pleased the holy Prior far beyond any thing else, and almost drove the worthy man wild with joy by his request to walk in his company over the grounds, and to see the whole of his establishment. When this demand was known, it became immediately fashionable, both with ladies and gentlemen, to pursue the same method of killing the time till noon, and they forthwith proceeded to follow the footsteps of the King wherever the Prior chose to lead him.

They traversed the dark and dusty library, where they were doomed to hear the interesting history of every worm-eaten volume; and then into the laboratory, where the Father would insist upon reciting the whole of his medical exploits among the poor foresters, and explained with complacency to the laughing lords and yawning ladies the precise complaint to which

each particular remedy was applied, and then, to the dismay of the greater portion of the company, mounted what appeared to them an interminable flight of stairs, to the observatory, which, having been built according to the Prior's own design, was what he prided himself upon the most of all, though what purpose it was intended to answer, surrounded as the convent was with an impenetrable forest, as yet remained a perfect mystery. From thence they were transferred, they scarcely knew how, into the garden, for the Prior had beheld from one of the elevated windows the figure of Isidore de Mireville, and he thought there could not be a better opportunity of thrusting him into the notice of the King.

His Majesty followed with good will, for he was beginning to grow restless and uneasy about the non-appearance of the Marquis de Croix, while the incessant and teasing inquiries

of Anne of Austria upon the subject, which was the one she had most at heart, greatly added to his annoyance.

Meanwhile the Novice had repaired to the garden with anxiety and dread; not that he wished, like the courtiers, to kill the short hour of interval before the renewal of prayer, nor yet to evade the tasks which he knew the brothers were ever ready to impose upon him, but merely because the Cardinal de Richelieu, upon leaving the chapel, had waved his hand in that direction, and it was impossible to mistake the gesture; it told as plainly as words could do, to go thither, and that he would follow. He was not deceived, for he had not tarried long before his Eminence himself appeared. He was delighted to find that Isidore had comprehended the sign; it augured well for the future confidence which he might have to repose in him. The youth trembled as

Richelieu drew nigh ; he searched with hurried hand for the key beneath his frock, where he had concealed it, and presented it, without speaking, to the Cardinal. The latter grasped it eagerly.

" He is safe ! he is safe !" exclaimed he joyfully : " Novice of Saint Firmin, I owe you many thanks ; you have served me to my entire satisfaction ; fear not,—rewards shall not be wanting. Did I not tell you I could recompense you well, and say now if I sought to deceive you ?"

He pointed to his broad hat, and Isidore looked up and bowed.

" Did I imagine you still doubtful and faint-hearted, I should explain, and apologise, and invent excuses to account for the apparent inconsistency of my conduct ; but to you this is unnecessary. Isidore de Mireville, when you are clothed as I am now, which you doubtless

one day will be, you will find many occasions when evil may be done if it lead to sure and certain good. Think you I earned my honours with a downcast look and a lowly carriage?—No, no; by bold and active measures, and faithful service to those who could aid my views."

Isidore smiled; his features brightened; many of the awkward scruples which had so troubled him during the day seemed to vanish while the Cardinal was speaking; he loved to hear those flattering words, although his own heart almost denied the possibility of their truth. But the Cardinal de Richelieu had beguiled many who had been considered wise in the ways of the world. Who can wonder, then, that his subtle arguments for the moment triumphed over the better feelings of a simple Novice, who had passed his whole life in utter seclusion?"

"Time presses," continued his Eminence; "I hear the approach of footsteps; his Majesty is, no doubt, approaching. I would ask but a few questions:—Did the Marquis make resistance? Did he draw his sword? Did he rush upon his assailants?"

"No, your Eminence, he resigned himself calmly into their hands, and was borne away without a word."

"That is strange, indeed!" said the Cardinal with surprise. "Did he not even ask you where they were about to bear him?"

"He spoke not, your Eminence."

"It is almost incredible! Did you not even hear the sound of his voice?"

"Not once."

"And this man has hitherto had a reputation for daring bravery! Sauvan and I could tell many such tales; but—ha! ha!—this is not the first time that—in short, I have a kind of

reputation for my skill in taming down fierce spirits."

Voices were now approaching; but the Cardinal was too politic to leave the Novice with the regret upon his mind which those last words might have created, and he hastened to dispel it with an allusion to his future good fortune, which he well knew would continue longer with the youth than any sorrow for the Marquis de Croix.

"I am well pleased with your endeavours," said he; "rely upon my constant aid. I can do little for you till you have taken the vows; but then your rapid elevation will be matter of surprise even to yourself. None have remained in obscurity upon whom the sunshine of my favour has once descended. Ha! the gate opens: it is, as I expected, the Prior of Saint Firmin conducting hither the King: his Majesty will doubtless speak to you; you will see

that I have already bespoken his good-will for you. There is M. de Combalet alone and *maussade*, as usual. I see not his wife. But stay, they are advancing hither. You are gathering flowers for the altar—I am discussing with you some point of interest in theology—you understand me!—let no one imagine that our conversation has been of any other importance."

The words had scarcely passed his lips ere they found themselves surrounded by the whole of the company.

The Prior immediately pointed out his nephew to the notice of the King. His Majesty instantly recognised the name. "This, then, is the Comte de Mireville's brother, for whom he last night interceded with such warm affection. I see that fraternal pleading has had, in this case, at least, some effect upon your Eminence."

"Yes, your Majesty," returned the Cardi-

nal, "I feel myself much interested for the youth. I think, indeed, that one day he may become one of the brightest ornaments of the Church."

"Did I not tell your Eminence just so?" exclaimed the Prior instantly, losing sight of every thing but the golden opportunity which the Novice now had of pushing his fortune; "as I told your Eminence the other night, he knows the whole of Saint Thomas Aquinas; and if we had not then been pressed for time, I would—"

The look which the Cardinal directed towards the speaker instantly checked his volubility. It would doubtless have attracted the attention of the King, had not her Majesty at that moment turned his thoughts into another channel.

"How much he resembles Aline!" said she kindly. "Surely your Eminence will agree

that one scion of so fair a stock is quite enough for the cloister."

"Ha! your Majesty cannot forget your favourite," said Louis, instantly recurring to the subject which was uppermost in his mind; "well, it is a pleasant thing to feel such friendships; pray Heaven your Majesty may never meet with ingratitude! It is bitter to find our affection thrown away, and our confidence misplaced,—and—and, alas! I speak from experience; look yonder at the clock above the convent roof, and then remember that the Marquis de Croix is not yet arrived."

The eyes of the Queen filled with tears, as she gazed in the direction which the King pointed out. Perhaps his Majesty perceived it, for he pressed her hand warmly, as he continued,

"But can we wonder that there should subsist no affection among strangers, when even that of a brother, warm at night, will fade be-

fore the morning? Look yonder at the Comte de Mireville, turning down that solitary walk with the Marquis de Combalet. It was but yesternight he promised to introduce yonder Novice to my especial notice, and to bespeak my future support; but see, the youth is already forgotten; a glance from the bright eyes of Madame de Combalet is now of far more importance than his brother's fortune."

"Nay; that is what might be expected from one so giddy and heedless as the Comte de Mireville," observed the Cardinal; "but from one who was all truth and honour, and loyalty,—at least, such was your Majesty's opinion,—this conduct is startling; it argues a total—in short it deserves—"

"We will return to the subject," said the King, hastily: "hark! the small bell is just ringing for prayers; we must now think of mercy, and do penance for our own neglect

of —— But fear not, we will not forget that justice also is to be rendered."

He turned hastily away to hide his emotion. It was evident that disappointment had saddened his spirit, and none of the courtiers ventured to speak; it was felt that to offer condolence would but give offence.

They all returned to the Chapel. The penitents repaired to the sacristy to divest themselves of their court suits, and replace them with the robe of penance; the spectators filled the body of the chapel, and the ladies crowded to the gallery which had been prepared for their accommodation. There was more bustle and anxiety attending the ceremony than the greatest court festival which they were in the habit of seeing daily.

It was indeed affecting to see these grandees and potentates of the earth prostrating themselves to the dust in the pure spirit of religion;

and some of the fair beholders were moved to tears, while others were playfully endeavouring to recognise their friends beneath the total disguise which all the penitents now wore. All opinions agreed that it was the King himself who walked first up to the altar, from the very conviction that the others would yield him the precedence. There was an exact similarity in the dress in which he was now attired to that of the rest, and no sign by which to distinguish its wearer. It was a robe of penitential sackcloth, girt with a thick rope. They all trod the marble pavement barefoot, and their heads enveloped in a *capuchon* of wide and ample dimensions, with no apparent opening, save for the eyes. Notwithstanding this absolute disguise, the ladies were sure that the Comte de Mireville was the next, by his dancing pace and light tread; then they were positive that he who followed was the Marquis de Sénange,

by the swaggering gait; all guessed at the Chevalier de Forlis, by the manner in which he brandished his taper, so like the way in which he flourished his *flamberge*; and as to the little Marquis de Préville, no one could mistake him in any crowd, now that he was divested of his high heels. Madame de la Mothe created much laughter; she declared that, in taking the two shoes from his feet, the poor little Marquis had taken one foot from his height. There was confusion after this; the dress had so altered the figures of the others, that it was impossible to determine who they were, and the ladies forthwith began to make bets upon the names of the penitents, and jests upon their appearance. But these were silenced for a time, as the last penitent issued from the sacristy. Who was he? No one could tell; his tall form towered far above the rest, and by his firm and lofty tread, and the proud toss

of his head, he was at first deemed to be the old General Duplessis; but no, the General had only one arm, and he was to be seen a little in advance, holding the taper in his left hand. The King knelt in his own place, the one he had before occupied, opposite to the Cardinal, who sat stately in his seat, and looking on his scarlet robe as though he himself were receiving the homage. The penitents all knelt down before the altar.

"There are just thirteen, the ill-starred luckless number!" exclaimed Madame de Nogaret.

"That is impossible," replied another lady, "for I counted them before they entered the sacristy, and there were only twelve."

This answer was sufficient, and no further questioning took place.

The low chanting of the *sept pseaumes* now

began; all other voices were silent while the penitents alone breathed forth the heart-rending responses.

"Whose deep and beautiful tones are those?" said the Queen—"hear you how they swell above the rest, soft and rich as the notes of the organ?"

"It is doubtless the Duc de Noailles—he never fails to remind us that he took lessons of Baltagarini in his youth, although we have never before heard him sing. Ha! but what ails Madame de Combalet?—And see, the tears are starting in her eyes — quite a miracle!"

"Nay, nay, it is nothing," exclaimed Madame de Combalet, looking wildly round; "but—but I wonder at your firmness; few could hear those prayers without weeping."

"Tears of sensibility, and from Madame de Combalet!" exclaimed Madame Dufargis

sneeringly; "they should be caught and set in gold as a locket for her husband!"

"Or for M. de Mireville!"

"Psha! he needs them not; he is favoured with her *smiles*."

The psalms were now sung, and the penitents arose and prepared to move in procession round the Chapel; the King walked alone at the head, and the others followed two and two: the Prior came last of all, sprinkling the holy water from his *asperge* in every direction. His wonder was much excited, for in spite of all his endeavours to marshal them in order, there would always remain an odd one behind: it puzzled him sorely, for he was no great reckoner: he counted them five times over, and each time he found thirteen, but he knew there were only twelve, and deemed it an optical delusion.

They returned at length to their places in

the choir; the stalls were all filled one after the other until there was not one vacant, and yet the little fat Marquis de Sandes was left in the middle of the choir, completely struck with astonishment, and, standing thus immoveable, his immense rotundity enveloped in the brown sackcloth, looked for all the world, as the ladies declared, like a hogshead of Canary. The Prior trembled when he turned; he thought some evil spirit lurked amongst them. None of the penitents appeared to notice this mysterious circumstance; their heads were all bent low in humble devotion; but had it not been that the strictest silence was commanded, the little fat Marquis would have regaled them aloud with some of the strange expressions which he was forced to mutter to himself: they suited well with his calling, the long sword and stirrups of a dragoon officer, but were certainly inconsistent with the sackcloth and ashes.

The service was long; it lasted till daylight grew faint: the chanting grew gradually softer from the exhaustion of the singers: many of the most devout had fasted the whole day: the King, who allowed himself no indulgence in matters of religion, had not tasted food since sunrise. The voices dropped off one by one; after the hour of *prône*, the responses were more and more faint and low, but still that deep and thrilling voice kept on firm and steady to the last, and ere long it was the only one heard; when the penance was over, and absolution was obtained, it rose strong and clear in the *jubilate*, even above the full chorus of the monks.

"I had thought there was but one such voice," said the Queen, as the penitents left the choir to enter the sacristy, and she herself prepared to descend, "and that belonged to the Marquis de Croix! I shall be quite

anxious to see whom we have got to replace him at Court, for he, alas! will never more be suffered to return."

The ladies descended to the body of the chapel; the Prior was proud to conduct them to the refectory, where a supper fit for such royal and noble guests had been provided.

The monks were all engaged in arranging matters concerning the banquet, and Isidore stayed behind alone in the chapel to extinguish the tapers and cover up the altar. It was now quite dark, for it was a season of the year when the daylight is of short duration, and the absence of a single taper was felt. It was while he was thus engaged that he suddenly thought he heard footsteps on the marble pavement. He at first imagined that it was some of the brothers, and continued his occupation without heeding it:—presently the sound of a female voice caused him to pause and listen: it was

answered by the deep tones of the Cardinal de Richelieu. Gradually he grew more and more interested, and finally his heart beat with violence at the subject of their conversation. He almost checked his respiration, and listened with eagerness as they continued, but the deep hurried whisper betrayed plainly that they were in haste and secrecy.

"And so your Eminence has so well succeeded?" said the lady; "in truth, none but yourself could have managed such an affair with so much discretion."

"I merit such praise, fair niece," said the Cardinal; "I had no little labour to accomplish it—riding hither by moonlight through the dark forest, and quite alone, for Desnoyers can scarcely be called a companion."

"But your Eminence is sure he is safe in the dungeon?"

"Safe, safe beneath our feet; I have the

key,—there is no escape thence; Sauvan saw him safely lodged, and—"

"But think you,—I had a strange suspicion I heard that deep voice; it thrilled to my very heart,—it made me fairly weep, it was so like his own."

"Ha! then—then—you love him, Madame de Combalet?"

"Love him!" exclaimed Madame de Combalet, while her voice faltered; "No, no, think it not; I—I love him? I hate him with a hatred that — And — and for his wife — Ah! would to Heaven they were both here together, and for ever;" and as she concluded she stamped her foot upon the pavement in sheer vexation.

"Amen, amen!" cried the Cardinal: "but fear not, we shall be amply revenged; the King will not forget this apparent neglect of his commands; a *lettre de cachet*, an *oubliette*,

and the drama closes for the Marquis de Croix !"

They withdrew through the door while they were yet speaking, and Isidore could hear no more, but he was left in a state of mind not to be described. He thought of the hapless prisoner, and his heart sank at the prospect of the dark fate which the cruelty of the Cardinal had prepared for him. His mind was distracted between the dread of the Cardinal's wrath, and his pity for the Marquis. But Isidore was too pious and humane to balance long; he was resolved to attempt his liberation; he knew that his brother would assist him, and they might yet rescue the captive from his impending fate. And then he remembered that the prisoner had not tasted food since the day preceding; and he instantly went to obtain it, before he himself entered the refectory, and laden with a small basket of pro-

visions and a little pitcher of wine descended to the dungeon.

He passed through the gloomy passages and down the moss-covered steps, resolved, rather than let the Marquis meet that miserable fate, to disclose the whole plot to the King. A sudden thought came across him, as he remembered the silence of the prisoner when the ruffians had borne him away; perhaps they had stabbed him in the dark. The reflection was too horrid to bear, and yet it quickened his steps and heightened his anxiety. He approached the dungeon door and listened in painful suspense; no sound was heard from within, but the wind whistled mournfully through the long dark passages, and its wild echo was the only answer returned to his low and soft reiterations of the Marquis's name.

He placed the small pitcher of wine upon the *tourniquet*, and again paused, but still no sound

from the dungeon gave notice that the captive was yet aware of the refreshment provided for him. Isidore was in an agony; the thought that perhaps through his neglect the prisoner might be unable to reach the *tourniquet* from cold and exhaustion, almost drove him to distraction. He had resolved to go round through the garden, and endeavour to make himself heard through the little grating: he had already turned for the purpose, when his joy may be conceived; he heard the rattling of the *tourniquet*. He drew near in a transport of delight to assist the prisoner in his efforts to reach the pitcher, but suddenly uttering a faint shriek, he suffered the lamp to fall from his hand, while he himself sank against the cold damp wall; the extended hand was fair and dimpled, and evidently one of a youthful female.

He rushed from the spot without a word, he did not pause to call or inquire; the mystery

of the seemingly defenceless state of the Marquis was now explained. He would have opened the dungeon on the instant, but the Cardinal had the key. He entered the refectory in almost frantic haste. The company was just on the point of sitting down to the banquet; many still retained their penitential dresses, but all, save one, had divested themselves of the *capuchon*. It was the tall penitent whose appearance had excited the curiosity of the ladies in the gallery, and who stood alone and silent, heedless of the wagers which the young courtiers, who imagined it was some idle jest of one of their companions, were making upon his identity.

They took their seats, and Isidore could not reach the Cardinal amid the bustle and confusion. His Eminence was in high glee and spirits; he was jesting with the young Seigneurs, and complimenting the ladies. The tall stranger

took his seat opposite to the prelate, who was laughing heartily at the curiosity which the penitent excited.

"We can eat nothing till that goblin is removed," cried M. de Mireville; "for Heaven's sake! exorcise it, your Eminence, that it may depart."

The Cardinal enjoyed the joke, for his heart was merry, and with mock solemnity he arose and stretched forth his arms, exclaiming, while the whole company was convulsed with laughter,

"Whatever thou be, spirit, or hobgoblin, arise and disclose thy name and station, or leave us forthwith!"

"Dunois de Seunevière, Marquis de Croix!" shouted the penitent in a voice of thunder; at the same moment the *capuchon* fell from his head, and discovered those handsome and well-known features.

A wild shriek burst from one of the ladies, but no one could guess from whom, until the lacqueys were seen bearing out the senseless form of Madame de Combalet. The event caused great confusion; but de Croix looked neither to the right nor left: he kept a steady burning gaze upon the Cardinal, who seemed as though suddenly struck by the wand of a magician.

"What means this mummery?" at length exclaimed the King.

"His Eminence can best explain, your Majesty; he thought to blacken me with foul ingratitude towards your Majesty, and I now come forward as his accuser. His plots were deeply laid, but Providence, and a woman's love, have marred them all! He had laid wait to bear me to a dungeon, that I might appear to defy your Majesty's commands, and reject your Majesty's kind and gracious advances. But—but I am here, my Lord Car-

dinal, and Aline my wife, the Marquise de Croix, is in that dungeon!"

"Ah, yes, he speaks truth!" exclaimed Isidore de Mireville, unable longer to control his emotion; "I have just come thence, and it is a woman who is there!"

"What! and has he made thy innocence the tool to work his own dark deeds!" exclaimed the undaunted Marquis. "Foolish boy! it is thine own sister whose gaoler thou hast been!"

A murmur of astonishment ran through the assembly. "And now, M. de Mireville," continued de Croix, turning to the Count, "I am ready to answer your challenge; I am ready, if you are still disposed to meet your sister's husband in the field!"

"Nay, God forbid!" exclaimed the Count, "there must be some mistake; why should I seek——"

"What! did you not write that letter, the

challenge to meet you in the wood at sunset, without witnesses, to fight till one of us should lay cold upon the green sward?"

"Never!"

"Nay, what a fool was I to believe it!—but I was at the chase when that letter arrived, and Aline had heard that men, wearing the Cardinal's liveries, had been in the woods surrounding our solitude, and she had a dread of evil. She opened that letter—she read it, and thought it was from her brother, and went to intercede.—But why need I recapitulate when all know that nothing is impossible to a woman's love. She hoped to pacify—she went to throw herself upon his mercy for me—she risked the peril and the danger for me—she has been ever since——But this is foolish," he continued hastily, and wiping his eyes, "she will be restored; and mark you, not a single hair of her beauteous head injured, or, by the God of

Heaven, my Lord Cardinal, your habit shall not protect you!" A faithful attendant followed her and witnessed the whole transaction, and knows that she is now in a dungeon of this convent!"

The King was in a tumult of emotion. "Is this true!" he exclaimed; "can such things really be? Release the prisoner, Sir Novice, if it be true that you know her place of confinement!"

"Alas! your Majesty, his Eminence has the key!"

"Yield it, my Lord Cardinal!" said the King sternly, and the Cardinal gave it from beneath his *soutane*, while every one present cried "Shame!" upon his Eminence, for they thought that his power was at an end.

In a few moments Aline was led into the refectory. She was pale and wan, and scarcely able to walk. She gazed wildly around for a

moment, as if unable to comprehend the scene; but suddenly her eye fell on the beautiful countenance of Anne of Austria, its placid and benign expression seemed to recall her to herself, and when that gentle mistress stretched forth her arms, Aline sprang forward, and forgetting respect in that sense of gratitude and love, sank into them with a sob of passionate emotion, and burst into tears. The dark cloak fell from her shoulders and revealed her white dress, and, as she bent forward on the Queen's neck, there were many who vowed they had never seen anything so beautiful as the pale and gentle bride of the Marquis de Croix!

"The air of the Court will not agree with your Eminence for a while," said the King, turning suddenly to the Cardinal; "we wish you peace and happiness in the place of retirement which you may choose. There is too much labour for you here, more than your

Eminence can well attend to, and, like a good physician, I would preserve quiet and repose. Madame de Combalet too, we perceive, is afflicted with hysterics. She will find the air of Ruelle an excellent restorative.

The Cardinal looked unutterable things; but Louis returned his dark glances tenfold, for he was not awed by the presence of his mother, who had remained at Chantilly.

The King turned to the trembling Isidore. "Your offence, Sir Novice," said he, "would require a just punishment; but, alas! when our spiritual guides thus go astray, who shall presume to judge? Go! nor forget that when you entered into this conspiracy, it was against the life and liberty of your sister's husband!"

The Cardinal withdrew in silence: it is not our province to say whither; but, perhaps, for the satisfaction of the reader, it will be well to do so. He went instantly to seek the Queen-

mother, to ask her intercession. It is needless for those who know the power which she possessed over her royal son, to say that she obtained a full forgiveness for her favourite; and almost before he had made half the journey to Avignon, which he had chosen as his place of retreat, he was recalled to Court; but he never molested, even when he was at the climax of power, those against whom he had conspired in this adventure. He felt that Providence had interfered in their behalf, and therefore attached no blame to any one for his miscarriage.

We know not if it was wholly this occurrence which disgusted Isidore with the service of the Church; but we find that none of his family ever rose to eminence in that profession; and that one Isidore de Mireville shortly after appeared at Court, and entered the King's guard. Here his timidity and innocence wholly deserted him; and from his great valour and great

beauty, he became celebrated as the most dreaded of knights and the admired champion of ladies.

This was our hero: but the Prior of Saint Firmin, although deserted in his old age, still loved the youth beyond every thing on earth. He continued to hoard, for his sake, every mite that could be spared from the poor. He never laid down his head without breathing a prayer for his welfare; and every night would he exclaim to the lay brother who made his milk posset, "Of a truth, my Isidore was a sweet and discreet youth! I should not now be Prior of Saint Firmin if he had breathed but one word of the share I took in the adventure of that memorable Ash-Wednesday."

THE END.

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